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Explicit Inclusion of Fun in Instruction as a Catalyst for Academic Success

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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College of Education

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Abstract

Low graduation rates, rising drop-out rates, and increasing apathy and disengagement in learning has prompted the need for new strategies and interventions in education. This case study provides an analysis of the perceptions of high school teachers related to the impact of the explicit, intentional inclusion of fun in direct instruction. The participants included approximately 20% of the faculty in a semirural high school of approximately 1,325 students. The case study involved individual interviews with half of the participants and the other half participating in a focus group conversation. Six participants in each group were observed. All comments and concepts were coded and analyzed in relation to the research question, "What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?" The themes of achievement, engagement, impediments, instruction, and motivation were identified during analysis. The data indicates that fun in instruction removes or limits barriers; improves academic achievement for students; and positively impacts students in the social-emotional realm. Implications for theory and practice involve a systemic reevaluation of standards and instructional strategies in order to effectively change the existing paradigm to a more efficient and impactful process of instructional practice.

Keywords: scholar-practitioner, dissertation, educational change, fun, learning, student achievement, academic success, engagement, effective instruction, motivation.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who taught me the value of integrity, respect, honor, hard work, humility, compassion, acceptance, and forgiveness; I know no greater man. I dedicate this to my husband and best friend, who taught me how to love in all the best ways and makes me a better human being every day. I dedicate this to my children and grandchildren and future generations, who I hope will learn the lessons that I did, and more, but with less heartache. I dedicate this to the academics, the teachers, and the learners; may you find curiosity to inspire you, joy in your successes to encourage you, resiliency to embrace disappointments and setbacks, and passion to motivate you to never give up on yourself; never surrender to discouragement or fear, and never, ever, stop learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The newer generations of students produce some interesting challenges for educators. Generation Y and the millennials have different perspectives and behaviors related to school and learning than prior generations (Hobbes, 2017). Over the past few decades, compared to past generations, young people are leaving educators less prepared for the future or understanding of the needs of adulthood (Dynarski, 2018). This reality places an unprecedented scrutiny on teachers and administrators to prepare students for a changing future.

The reasons millennials find themselves unprepared for traditional academic and work pathways and disconnected from the expectations of employers, educators, and leaders from prior generations are myriad. The lack of engagement in learning and the decreases in motivation leave parents and employers wondering why there has been such a paradigm shift from the perspective of prior generations in terms of the value of school and preparing for the workplace and future living. Educators are often accused of being the culprit in the increase of the unprepared, unmotivated, and apathetic workforce and citizenry now entering adulthood (Pink, 2011).

Therefore, school leaders struggle to find solutions to counteract disengagement, decrease counterintuitive behaviors, and eliminate apathy as they try to identify keys to the augmentation of work ethic, and increase individual and group levels of engagement and motivation (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). One contributing factor to education has been left virtually overlooked as an intentional instructional strategy: fun. The deliberate inclusion of fun as a purposeful learning strategy addresses these issues. Teacher perceptions of the impact of using fun as an intentional instructional strategy are the focus of this study. Participants from a faculty group that were

intentionally using fun in direct instruction as part of an instructional initiative were invited to participate in the study. Participants used direct instruction strategies that meet the definition of fun as described in this study. During the study, participants shared any impact they noticed in the areas of student learning, academic growth, overall academic success, and social-emotional barriers. Changes students experienced from prior to the intentional inclusion of fun during instruction to after the inclusion of new strategies were shared via the participants' perceptions.

Students today are not engaging in school and learning in the same ways they did in prior generations when there was more support at home for the completion of homework, attendance at school, and passing classes in general. There was greater societal pressure to go to college, and graduation was an expectation from most homes and community stakeholders (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). The shift is undeniably notable. Graduation rates, while having risen technically, are becoming more and more impacted by credit recovery and alternative measures that skip traditional proof-of-learning over completion of packets or online courses that are truncated, allowing students to complete a minimal amount of work (Dynarski, 2018).

Oregon completion rates remain low and graduation rates are 48th in the nation according to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE, 2018) even though postgraduation opportunities for degrees, certificates, and training are growing and becoming more and more accessible and affordable. However, the student population struggles to find motivation to engage in learning and move forward in the educational pursuits that are available. Employers and universities alike find the entry-level participants unfamiliar with traditional work place or educational norms and struggle to provide remedial classes and/or trainings to bring them up to speed (Spiker, 2015).

Societal changes over time have created transitions in learning and transformed the role of school in the lives of our children. Disengagement is at an all-time high, and the attempts to conquer the problem (mandates, programs, training) appear to be ineffective against the rising tide of apathy in our youth (Burgess, 2012). The variables related to the symptoms arising in education are innumerable (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011). It is the equivalent of trying to play "Whack-a-Mole" as school leaders across the country try to fix each problem that arises.

The Generation Y and millennial children have shown the education community that they are not like the students of the past (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011). Therefore, school leaders and educators must find a way to reconnect with this new generation of kids and breathe life into learning again. This study investigated the perspectives of high school teachers who integrated fun into the classroom as an explicit instructional strategy to determine if it is a possible solution for many academic problems and learning barriers.

In this study, fun is characterized as the combination of a lesson, activity, or experience that is connected to the standards-based curriculum and produces a positive emotional response in the participant. This definition is supported by the work of Fluegge (2008), who did research using this perspective on the semantics of the word "fun" for researching the role of fun in the workplace. Fluegge (2008) found that fun activities in the workplace such as social or off-site team-building experiences, low-stakes competitions, celebrations and other interactive behaviors was beneficial in terms productivity, and morale and decreased turn-over in the workplace. The study involved looking at teacher perceptions on the intentional inclusion of fun activities as vehicles for deeper, more meaningful, and longer-lasting learning as well as overcoming some of the traditional barriers to student engagement such as learning disabilities, social-emotional issues, or negative self-perception.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The school that was selected for this study is in Oregon, which ranks 48th in high school graduation rates and averages only 165 instructional days per year (Willis, 2018). The district has a history of trying innovative techniques to improve student achievement. There is extensive professional development time, include early release once a week for the express purpose of supporting collaboration and training. With research that supports the theory that motivation is increased when students have a personal purpose for the work (Pink, 2011), the staff in the school were given the opportunity to experiment with the deliberate inclusion of fun in instruction to see if fun in itself can be enough reason for students to intrinsically engage in learning, and potentially determine if and/or how fun impacts student academic growth and success.

Background. With the transition of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001, to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, there were shifts in the power of standardized testing. The ESEA had been originally used to identify schools with issues of equity to provide additional funds to schools with high-risk populations. Widespread use of standardized testing for teacher evaluation transitioned the law into an accountability measure designed to identify and eliminate under-performing schools and educators. The mandates and recommendations from the law currently are used in many districts as a growth measurement as well as an accountability tool (National Center for Education Statistics NCES, 2018; United States Department of Education [USDE], 2018).

The change of influence of student test scores caused educators to “teach to the test” and increase language arts and mathematics instructional time. Educator perceptions are that the

increases in math and language arts come at the expense of other subjects such as social studies, science, physical education, art, and music at the elementary and middle school levels. There is also a belief among educators that administration prefers to remove what they perceive as non-core activities that could be classified as extraneous, such as projects or games and were usually considered to be fun. These activities often included aspects that traditionally addressed other aspects of the multiple intelligences such as kinesthetic, artistic, musical, or other known alternative intelligences that have often been credited as keeping students engaged in school (Styron & Styron, 2012).

There is a need to assess growth to measure the effectiveness of instruction (Lemov, Hernandez, & Kim, 2016). It is important for teachers to help students move along the curriculum continuum. However, motivating them to do the activities necessary for growth can be challenging, especially with at-risk and disengaged students. There is a need for substantive accountability, but there is a danger in removing traditional motivators (curriculum related activities, projects, games) that students consider fun and engaging. Organizations such as the Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation, n.d.) and the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET, 2018) have used teacher evaluation as major components of the requirements for districts to receive money for the grants that are offered. With this kind of pressure, it becomes hard for teachers to justify adding anything that could be challenged by administration or other stakeholders as not directly related to instruction of the content.

Teachers have been offered additional earnings as incentives to improve instructional results according to the United States Department of Education (USDE, 2018), even though a comprehensive multiple year, $10 million study from Vanderbilt University concluded that incentive pay does not raise scores (Moran, 2010). The report basically indicated that teachers

do not have the time to do the things they need to do. Adding a financial reward did not give them any more time in the day to do the work. The debate still rages in terms of looking for the silver bullet to improve academic success for all students (Styron & Styron, 2012).

In defining student engagement, there are two main concepts. The first is related to the actual perceptions of students relative to their desire to participate in learning. "Generally speaking, the concept of student engagement is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise disengaged" (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016, para. 1). The second aspect to consider is engagement in terms of interaction with the content from which students will be evaluated during assessment. If a student likes the teacher, they will probably engage in learning what the teacher presents, so it is incumbent upon the teachers to ensure what they present is indeed what the student needs to learn to pass the assessments (Burgess, 2012).

Effective instruction is important and should be evaluated to ensure that students are being taught by competent, effective educators (Lemov et al., 2016). Teachers' lessons during instruction should be explicitly connected to the content and engaging for students so that they invest in the information intrinsically and are able to demonstrate their new learning via assessment (Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2010). However, teacher concerns about being judged, punished, or dismissed cause them to push many actions out of their instruction to prepare students to pass tests. Fears of being evaluated based on test scores are valid when testing becomes high-stakes, as it often is in the current educational system in this country (Styron & Styron, 2012).

Effective teacher evaluation systems use rubrics and multiple standards with levels of growth and ability that allow a teacher to move along a continuum. These levels should be clearly articulated with evidence and expectations (Marzano, 2018; Darling-Hammond, & Snyder, 2000). In these evaluation systems, effective instruction includes everything from transitions to curriculum knowledge, to interactions with students and more (Lemov et al., 2016). Administrators need to assess the effectiveness of each teacher in all of these areas and ensure that students have the best possible chance of becoming engaged and interested in learning so they can experience more academic success.

The intentional inclusion of the social-emotional realm for students is important to increase student involvement in individual learning (Nagaoka et al., 2015). It is, however, not discussed in traditional teacher evaluation methods, nor included in traditional teacher education models. Student engagement at the social-emotional level is complicated in concept and ability to measure (Haas, Anderson, & Filkowski, 2015). By addressing the social-emotional realm intentionally, it may be possible to overcome many other obstacles for students.

Context. The selected school for this study is located in a state with low graduation rates, high-stakes benchmark assessments for students, and a group of teachers who have volunteered to intentionally include fun in instruction and observe the effects. The high school is a comprehensive high school with a traditionally low graduation rate that runs continuously below the state average and has a history of implementing innovative programs and systems to try to improve statistics. The teachers who intentionally included fun in their classes were given opportunities to develop lessons that include aspects of playing a game and team competition, with roles for all personality and ability types. The lessons were implemented in multiple subject areas and grade levels to see if teachers observed any notable improvements in the areas of

motivation, engagement, social/emotional improvement, and academic success (Tews, Michel, & Noe, 2017).

The teachers were given the freedom of using the activities for a lesson, unit, or semester. It could also be used as a pre-assessment before instruction, or as a formative-assessment after instruction. All teachers were given support and mentoring, with modeling of strategies, for the implementation of the chosen activities. They were also given the liberty of including any activities they choose that are aligned to the curriculum. But they were asked to observe student engagement during those activities to see if the students appear to find the activity fun as well, and then observe any effects from the process (Burgess, 2012).

This situation provided a rich backdrop for this study. The expectation that teachers pay attention to the instructional application of fun and the culminating effects of the activity (and other activities they employ) ensured that the perceptions of the teachers were fresh and well-documented in their own minds. The decision to try fun as an intervention is based on much of the research related to beneficial effects of fun as examined by Tews et al. (2017), who expanded the research related to the role of fun in informal learning as an amplifier for information acquisition. As recommended by Pink (2011), the process also included reflection and documentation by the teachers to monitor the motivational effects of the implementation (as observed) and informal teacher assessment of the impact.

The reflection process and informal, anecdotal analysis of student learning is supported by the research of Immordino-Yang (2016), Pink (2011), and Burgess (2012) and was discussed individually through interviews and in a focus group. Student achievement data were not solicited, but rather the teachers were asked to note perceptions related to any changes in student behaviors, engagement, and/or the process in general. It should be noted that the teachers

involved all indicated that they would be tracking student data on their own as relative to the differences in past performances by prior groups of students for the same lessons or units to which they were intentionally adding fun. All references to student achievement were provided spontaneously in interviews or the focus group conversation by teachers in order to provide anecdotal or other evidentiary information to support their perceptions as they answered the questions in Appendix D for the interviews or E for the focus group conversation.

History. Less than half of the students at the high school level pass state achievement exams at the recommended levels (ODE, 2018). This troubling statistic prompted questions about exam difficulty and implementation. The content covered in the tests is basic information that would be considered 8th grade level, and all students should be able to hit the mark by the 11th grade when they are tested (Common Core, n.d.). Dweck (2007) supported the concept of increasing levels of intelligence over time and her growth mindset theory has widespread support. This is, in essence, a belief that people gain more and more knowledge and increase the capacity of the brain to understand and process information and learn new things over time. There is not a finite amount of intelligence or mental ability; however, time is the variable. As one participant in this study noted, "Everyone can learn calculus, some just aren't ready until they are 30." The findings were subsequently monitored and reexamined and evaluated as recently as 2016 by many groups and programs, including the work of Kaufman and Gregoire (2016) and the ongoing use of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. This type of recurring scrutiny of programs to ensure validation indicate that students today *should* be perfectly capable of demonstrating knowledge three grades below their current level, but they do not (ODE, 2018).

Washor and Mojkowski (2014) examined the high cost of student boredom and disengagement, and subsequent studies continue to support the claims. "About 30% of the students indicate they are bored due to lack of interaction with *teachers* and 75% report material being taught is *not interesting*" (Bryner, 2007, para. 3). Research has suggested that bored students will not get as much out of school as engaged students because they think only about what they care about (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Therefore, educators must make the learning something students care about in some way so that they will invest time in thinking about the learning. Fortunately, teachers who intentionally include fun can engage otherwise bored students.

Effective engagement draws students into the curriculum. An engaging teacher may or may not actually convey learning to the students. The need to draw students back into learning is a clear and pressing problem. The barriers (self-perception, learning disabilities, social-emotional issues) are well documented in study after study. The primary culprit is boredom and yet teachers have removed more and more of the fun in order to provide more direct instruction and interventions to correct the lack of learning (Burgess, 2012). It is a Catch-22 problem.

Conceptual framework. The premise of the study is predicated on observing and identifying instructional actions that increase individual student motivation via the inclusion of fun. The progressivism framework of Dewey (1933) sets the stage for the role of educating the whole child for the betterment of society. His work is still cited as relevant in the realm of education. Considering the decline of societal norms and disintegration of a cohesive American culture as described by Packer (2013), it is important that people not ignore these qualities as our nation moves forward. As an outgrowth of Dewey's theories and premises related to learning, Dweck (2007) and the concept of a growth mindset is also part of this framework in that they

relate to the overall abilities of an individual. The growth mindset sets the stage for encouraging students in their own ability to increase the use of their brains and develop higher-level thinking skills over time, and not feel that they are limited by genetic or other boundaries. When students understand their own abilities in terms of learning, as well as the innate ability to increase their learning and strengthen their academic skills, there is more likelihood that they will feel empowered and motivated. Pink (2011) clearly demonstrated that the ability to improve and master things is one of the three primary components of motivation making it vital for teachers to connect instruction to further growth and learning that they can master.

Immordino-Yang (2016) and Saarni (1999) have shown the impact of neuroscience on individuals in terms of learning. Student self-perception is paramount when it comes to their belief in their ability to learn and their feelings about intelligence in themselves and others. Consequently, the importance each individual gives learning and school is significantly impacted by internal dialogs related to self-perception and ability. These negative, individual beliefs can be addressed via instruction and dialog between teachers and students. By addressing the needs of the whole child and meeting emotional and social needs, the research suggests that learning will be facilitated, and this can be achieved with deliberate teacher actions in the explicit inclusion of fun as an instructional strategy to remove barriers students may have related to learning and/or school.

Statement of the Problem

Graduation rates and drop out percentages continue to rise in many districts and states (USDE, 2018). One out of every four students among incoming college freshmen need remediation (Douglas-Gabriel, 2016). Thus, students are not learning at the same levels and/or not engaging in learning in the same way as past generations. Pink (2011) found that traditional

academic motivational strategies no longer have the same impact on academic success and learning in general. There is a need to increase authentic learning and retention. The primary areas addressed in this problem have been researched through the work of Tews et al. (2017) related to the inclusion of fun in work, Immordino-Yang (2016) who addressed mental focus, Machera and Machera (2017) and the work on engagement, and Pink (2013) who did work with motivation. Tews et al. (2017) explored purposeful inclusion of fun in workplace activities and determined that this created a significant increase in informal learning. Immordino-Yang (2016) identified and demonstrated categorically the fact that what students choose to focus on, or think about, is determined by the individual and attention or focus on any given thought cannot be demanded by external impetus, including teachers, parents, employers, and so on. Emotions and self-perception in students are directly correlated to individual growth and learning and impact what a student chooses as his or her focus. What can also be seen as a primary culprit in this problem is the decrease in motivation and engagement. The apathy and disengagement, which is extremely detrimental to learning, is changing with the newer generations, and progressively worsening (Pink, 2011).

Tews et al. (2017) found that support for fun from those in leadership leads to people circumstances where learning individually is facilitated, but the fun activities involved learning from and with peers more informally. However, the learning was deeper and more readily accessed in the course of their work or tasks. Machera and Machera (2017) affirmed that active engagement in the learning process is contingent on enjoyment in the learning process. Boredom, disengagement, apathy and discouragement have contributed to a general malaise in the student population that results in greater and greater numbers of students cutting classes and/or failing to reach basic educational standards (Fallis & Opotow, 2003; ODE, 2018). In

many cases students drop out of school and cite boredom as a primary reason (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). This impetus to drop out due to boredom prompts educators to try to figure out how to alleviate disengagement while still providing the focus on direct instruction to meet testing standards and administrative expectations.

The focus on test scores has pushed educators to incorporate more and more direct instruction and new instructional strategies and programs and, consequently, less activities that students consider fun (Lemov et al., 2016; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). The lack of enjoyment during the learning process is a major factor in student apathy and discouragement in learning. Including fun activities in the work place has been shown to increase informal learning (Tews et al., 2017); however, there is a lack of research on how explicit use of fun in formal instruction impacts academic learning. The faculty of the high school involved in the study were interested in trying to solve the problem and began with the intent of identifying actions to address the issues. The process that follows below is the manner by which the faculty addressed the issues before them. The choice to focus on fun as an instructional strategy sets the stage for this case study. In order to determine a plan of action, the faculty began by discussed the issues related to the areas delineated in the recent state report card for the school from the Department of Education (2018). Faculty brainstormed the responses from their adult perspective. At some point, one of the teachers suggested that students be asked about their perceptions and opinions. After much discussion, students and staff were sent a simple, one question survey, “Why don’t students do well in school?” The response was from over 85% of the students and staff surveyed.

Answers were sorted into like concepts and then given a categorical name to cover the ideas encompassed under the umbrella of each concept. For example, negative comments about

teachers were sorted into categories, those that related to negatives about the teacher, for example, “don’t like the teacher” or “issues with authority” versus negatives about the instruction which was divided into categories that described issues with comprehension “can’t do/never learned earlier skills” or “content is over their head or not developmentally appropriate.” The categorical names were determined by consensus as meeting parameters of accuracy as required by the group.

The sorting process led to the development of the list found in Table 1. which is the initial list of generalized concepts generated from the survey. These concepts were generalized via a consensus-building model of collaboration among faculty, staff and administration. Every label had to have 100% consensus on the exact wording and underlying meaning of the concepts covered to be included on the list. This level of care in the word choice and semantic precision that was supported by all stakeholders brought credibility and increased buy-in of the participants in the overall process. The generalized reasons were once again sorted, grouped and given over-arching themes via the same process as the initial list in Table 1. Deliberate attention to vocabulary that would retain the intent of the initial semantics was utilized to ensure full inclusion of all the concepts represented in the list. A dozen concepts were developed via the sorting process and Table 2 reflects the new groupings that would be used in the next step of the process.

These concepts were in line with the vocabulary and semantics involved, the discussions that had taken place, and the survey responses and comments. The team agreed by consensus that the groupings were accurate and reflected the content as provided as input by the participants. The belief was that the groupings would facilitate the process and allow for a more robust exploration of the concepts. A decreased, more manageable number of concepts to review

would decrease the time needed and allow the team to work through the content in a variety of different ways to process the information. At that point a more in-depth analysis began.

Table 1

Informal Survey Results: Generalized Reasons for Students Not Doing Well in School

Social/emotional difficulties	Time management issues	Think they are dumb
Don't like the teacher	Outside work or tasks	Lack of confidence
Don't like the subject	Overloaded	Embarrassed
Bored	Lack of understanding	Don't know how to study
Can't do the work	Self-defeating thoughts	Don't think school matters
Won't do the work	View school as "prison"	Issues with authority
Skipping class	Lack of support at home	Think teacher isn't good
Feels like no one cares if they do well	Never learned earlier skills or vocabulary	Content is over head or not developmentally appropriate

As the staff examined the initial list, they placed the topics in boxes in a circle in order to utilize a "relations diagram" (Hess & Robbins, 2012) to show the relationship between all of the generalized areas identified in the initial surveys and conversations. Figure 1 shows the initial diagram, prior to doing the relations process for analysis. The consensus was that there were "no surprises" in the list. At that point, the discussion about what to do next began. Faculty discussed the diagram and the determination was that while the items were representative of the input from the initial faculty conversation and the survey, there were too many areas that they could not actually tackle within the boundaries of the educational environment. It was determined that areas out of the locus of control of a classroom teacher would be eliminated in the next step. The group determined which concepts were beyond the locus of control of the

work due to several factors: the location, for example the students' homes; the interpersonal experience, such as relationships with people not in the school; or, physical, emotional, or psychological factors. Those concepts are reflected by a double box in Figure 1.

Table 2

Generalized Reasons for Students Not Doing Well in School Second Sort Concepts

Ability: learning disabilities
Ability: gaps, scaffolding
Personal choice implications, e.g. not sleep due to staying up
Bored/lack interest
Poor instruction
Distracted (phones, social media, others)
Peer Issues: negative (bullying)
Adult Issues: authority, dislike teacher/other
Believe they cannot learn
Procrastination
Maslow's Hierarchy: safety, shelter, food, (mobility, abuse)

The areas that were determined to be out of the locus of control of teachers were then omitted from the work that came next, leaving eight general, approachable factors for further investigation. The use of the Relations Diagram (Hess & Robbins, 2012) identified the relationships between multiple contributors to a situation. The problem was stated, and the possible causes related to the problem were listed around the circle. After the elimination of the areas outside of the locus of control of the classroom teachers, the second step in the process was to create the circle again, with only the items to be explored further. This allowed the team to

identify the areas that were reactions or “effects” of the concepts that would be identified as the impetus or “causes” of the problems. Figure 2 shows the diagram ready for the next step having omitted the concepts that were out of the locus of control of classroom teachers. The faculty believed that these concepts could all be addressed in an academic setting.

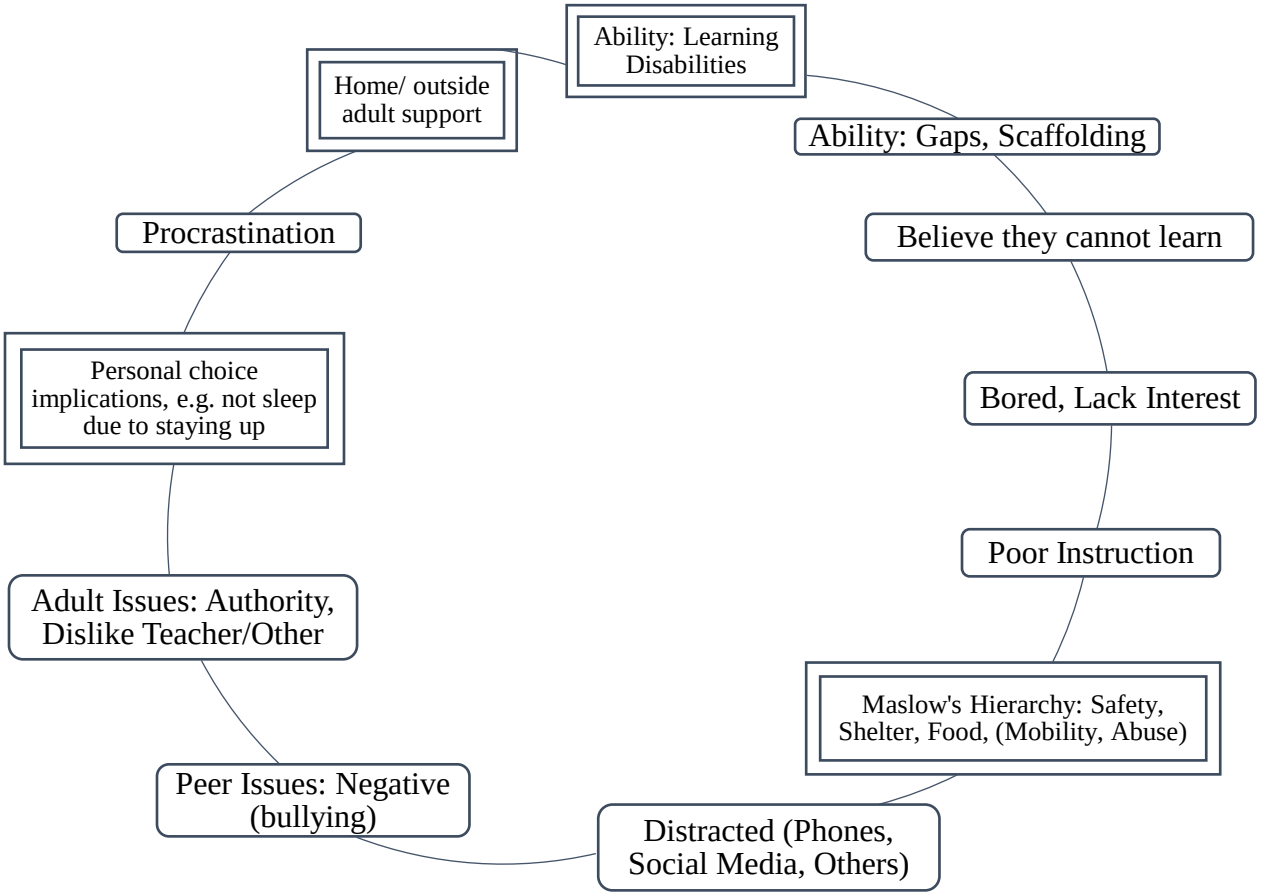

Figure 1. Initial groupings of generalized reasons students do not do well in school with double boxes around those areas out of the locus of control of the teacher (Relations Diagram Template, Hess& Robbins, 2012).

Teachers can encourage effective student behaviors and discourage the ineffective actions as they educate students with correct information in order to fill-in knowledge or perception gaps. They help students address interpersonal issues they may have with others by including

content related to relationships, communication, and problem solving, within the school environment, as well as educate students about how to behave in a successful manner when they are not in school. Students can be given information to empower them in other areas of their lives, but for the purpose of the work the school wanted to address, it was important to isolate the work to things that would impact the setting most effectively (Schmoker, 2018).

Each component was looked at independently and then compared to every other idea in the circle, one concept at a time, asking the question, "Which of these two concepts 'causes' or contributes primarily to the other?" An arrow was drawn from the "cause" to the "effect." A dot was used at the base of an arrow to create a clear identifier of the "causes" of the pairing and an arrow head on the "effects" end. For the purposes of determining need, areas with dots would be treated as possible causes to be addressed by the school, and the arrows were areas that would hopefully be resolved by the work done in an attempt to fix the issues.

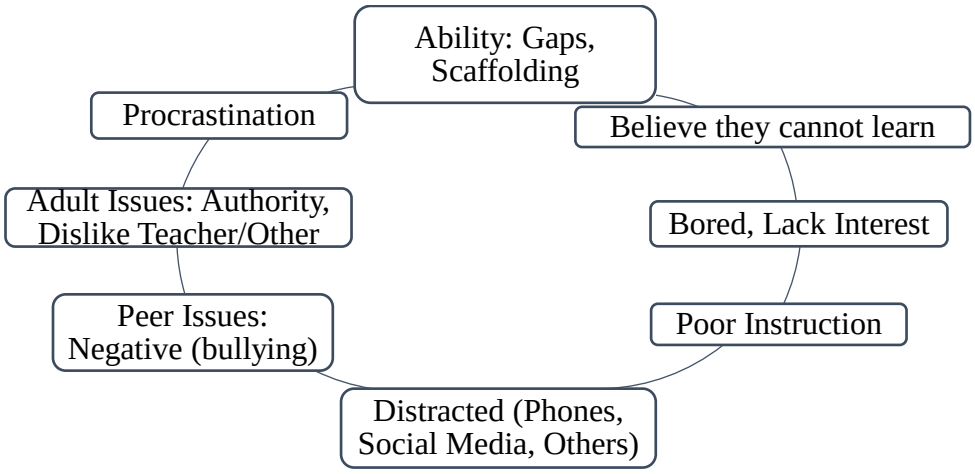

Figure 2. Groupings of reasons students do not do well in school with areas out of the locus of control of the teacher removed (Hess & Robbins, 2012).

The Figure 3 example shows that being bored is a "cause" for being distracted (phones, social media, others) because it was believed by consensus of the group that if students are distracted, their attention is focused on something, and therefore, they are not bored. The

analysis tool shows an arrow that initiates with a dot by the "bored, lacks interest" box and ends with an arrow tip at the "distracted (phones, social media, others)" box. The intent was to discover which were the "causes" that could be addressed, and which were the "effects" that should have beneficial outcomes from the process. Addressing those "causes" should, in theory, create solutions for the other areas without the need to develop strategies for every area all at once, thereby decreasing the amount of effort required to make a significant difference.

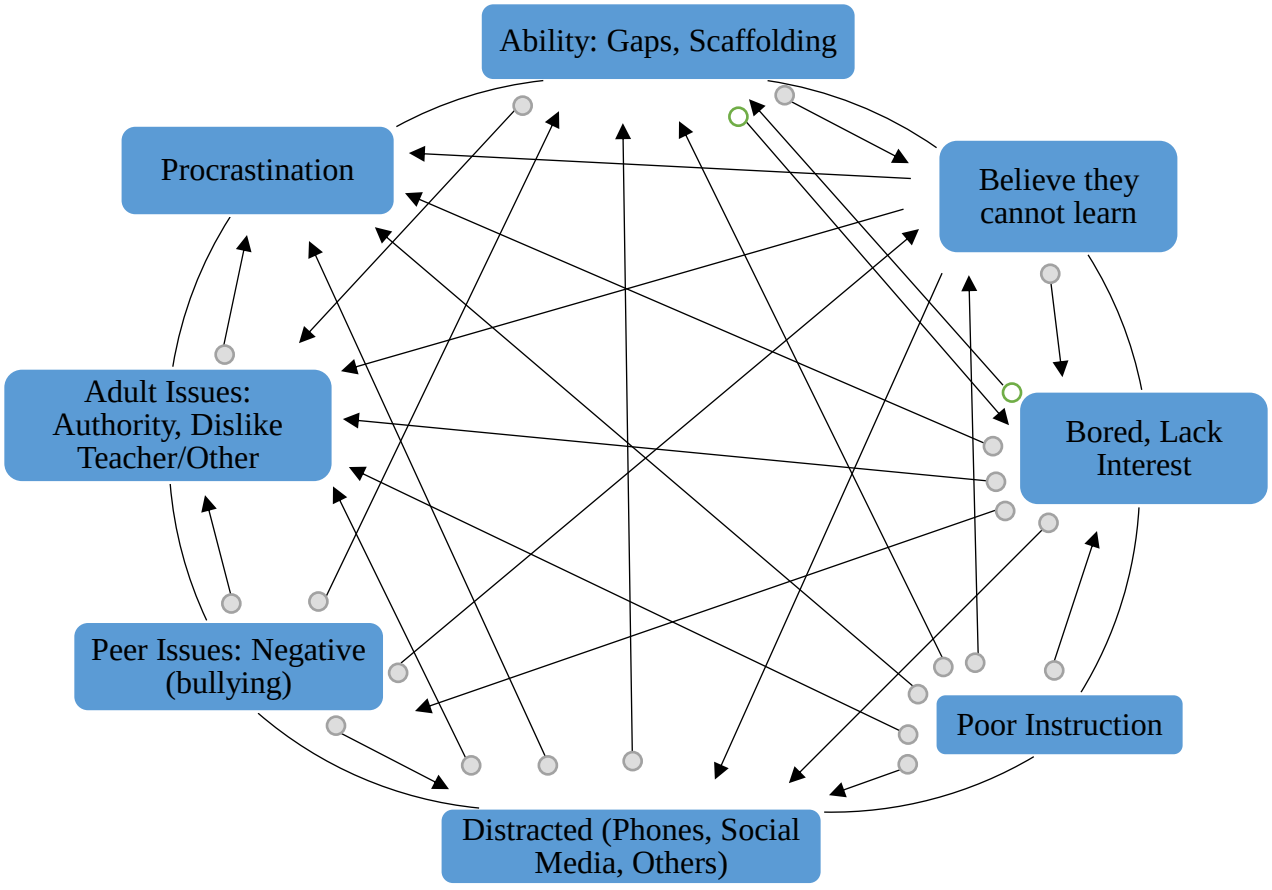

Figure 3. Groupings in locus of control of general education classroom teachers with relationships identified (Relations Diagram Template, Hess & Robbins, 2012).

Figure 3 shows the relationships between each of the concepts in the diagram. Each box was viewed in relation to each of the others. The discussion between each set of components lead the team to examine common beliefs of the team and to research some of the concepts

informally via online resources and/or basic definitions from the dictionary to ensure as much credibility of the decisions as possible. Once completed, the number of "causes" and "effects" for each category were tallied and placed in Table 3 to quantify the information identified in the relations diagram. The perceptions were subjective in that the team reviewing the data did not do research for the determinations, but rather based the placements on the professional, collective knowledge and beliefs of the teachers and administrators involved to such an extent that there was confidence in the validity of the selections and confidence in the process.

Table 3

Relations Diagram "Cause" and "Effect" Indicators by Concept

Concept	No. of "cause" indicators	No. of "effect" indicators
Ability: Gaps, scaffolding	3	4
Believe they cannot learn	4	3
Bored, lack interest	5	3
Poor instruction	6	0
Distracted (phones, social media, others)	3	4
Peer issues: Negative (bullying)	4	1
Adult issues: authority, dislike teacher/other	1	6
Procrastination	0	5

The two items within the locus of control of the teachers that appeared to be the greatest culprits regarding student success were "Poor Instruction" and "Bored, Lack Interest." The district involved dedicates extensive professional development funds and training to work on instruction and effective evaluation of instruction. Therefore, a focus on "Bored, Lack Interest" became the primary impetus for the study. Teachers were then invited to try to add fun to their

instruction to see if it made a difference, and if so, in what ways. The study developed from what appeared to be natural steps to investigate what the research could contribute to understanding the issues the teachers wanted to address. Further investigation brought forth many reasons for lack of interest and boredom: issues about learning itself, issues with motivation, and issues related to emotions and the impact they have on student to such an extent as to impede motivation and learning. The underlying concern was how to help students learn once teachers have their interest and therefore their attention. Figure 4 shows the eight primary contributing factors of learning.

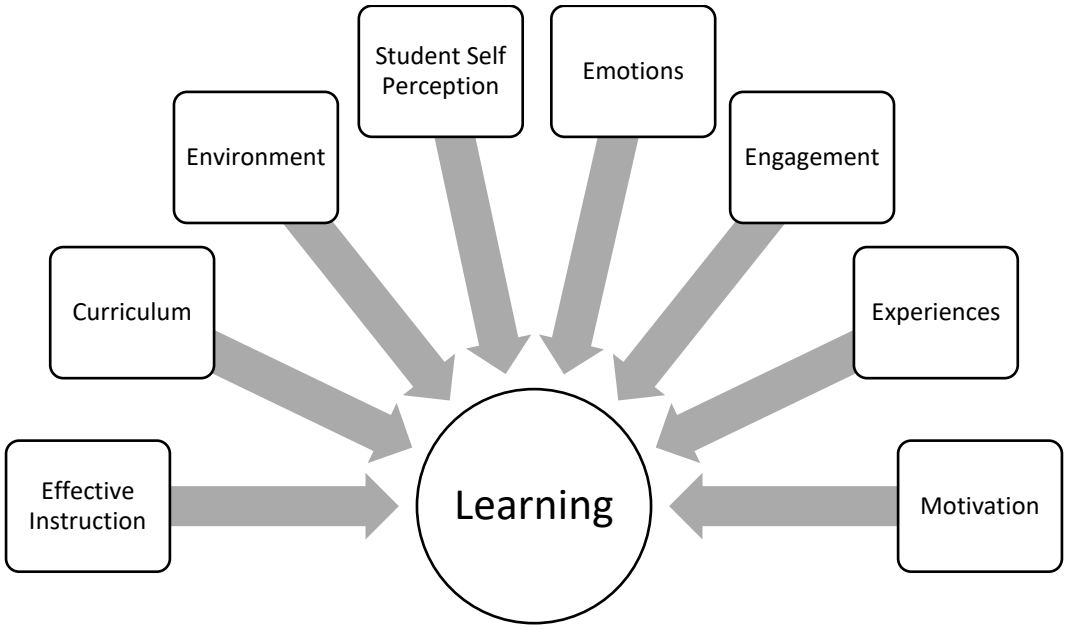

Figure 4. Contributing factors of learning

When examined separately, the concerns about learning or a belief in the ability to learn can create barriers for students because the act of learning is complex (National Academy of Sciences, 2018). There are factors that are mentioned periodically in the literature, but the bulk of the research repeatedly references these same concepts. Of these concepts, there are many factors that cannot be controlled, such as biological, physical, mental or emotional disabilities or deficiencies. There are social and familial issues or situations that impact the ability to focus or

enjoy learning. There are cultural and behavioral contributors as well. In short, the odds are that there may be one or more variables that could interfere with a student's ability to learn new information (Ripp, 2016). With the complexities of learning interweaving with the societal and familial circumstances, it is difficult for education to address all the moving parts and navigate the needs of students effectively. A look at the main contributors to learning, motivation and emotions, uncovers multiple and complex contributors for each. Based on the research of Barker (2017), Pink (2013) and Hallowell (2011), Figure 5 illustrates nine primary factors of motivation.

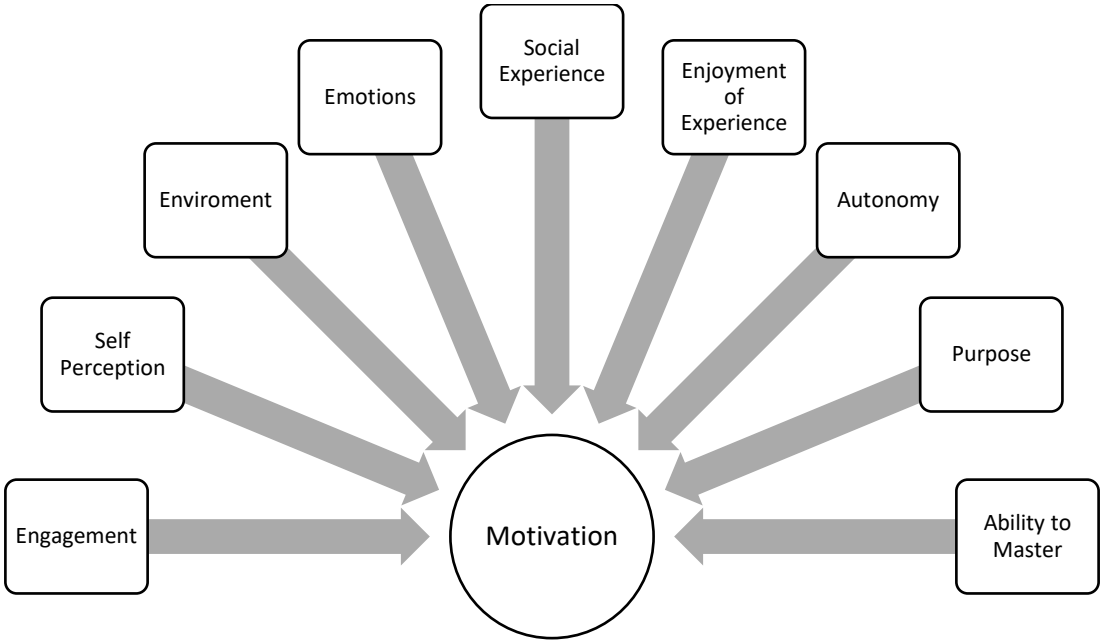

Figure 5. Contributing factors of motivation

In order to address student motivation as a stand-alone component, current belief and practice buys into the idea that one needs to look at all the differing components individually, and then identify the distinct aspects that can be implemented in order to "motivate" the students. This same problem exists with the components of emotions as well. Figure 6 shows 10 contributing factors to emotions. These are based on the research of Immordino-Yang (2016) and Frijda and Mesquita (2000).

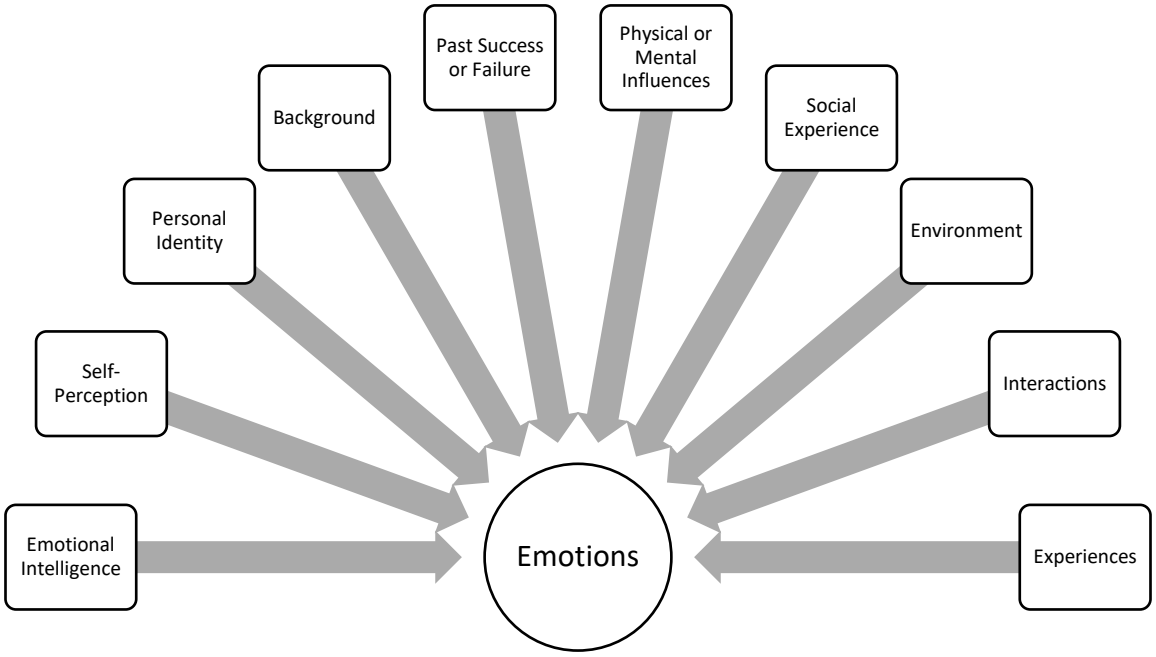

Figure 6. Emotions relations diagram.

The components once again range from the obvious, such as interactions, to the more intricate and difficult to identify and address, such as self-perception. An additional problem is that these processes are so complex and have so many aspects that extensive training and ongoing "tune ups" are often necessary for implementation of the programs with fidelity. This has been an ongoing lament in the field. Teachers have been professionally developed to death on multiple programs that are presented by administration with the expectation of implementation with fidelity, without removing anything from the already full plate of the teacher.

What this has done in the realm of education is to have created a wealth of programs, books, strategies and implementation plans that require training and ongoing support for each component of the problems to administrators and teachers across the nation requiring teacher to implement multiple programs at the same time. This decreases the probability of success as fidelity of implementation wanes with more work on the teacher's part leaving students with

incomplete information or instruction that lacks cohesion. There is currently no single program or strategy available that addresses all these components. Considering that programs are introduced to the academic community on a continual basis, the number of programs purchased by any given district can be overwhelming for faculty members and students alike. There is a clear and present need to simplify the work for all stakeholders so that there can be fidelity in the implementation of a few high-impact, successful things, rather than the additional stresses caused by the requirement of utilizing and implementing multiple programs. This could also maximize more time, and ostensibly alleviate the overwhelming work environment for teachers and allow them to find more time for activities and lessons that have fallen by the wayside as they filled time up with reading and math and pushed other topics to the sidelines or out of the picture entirely (Schmoker, 2018).

In the process of researching the issue a singular question emerged, what emotion might be the most positive, and therefore have the best chance of making a difference? From a purely subjective position, the idea of fun came to the forefront. Further research into the role that fun plays in emotions was convincing as a construct and became the primary research topic to see what information was present about fun in general and fun as a strategy in learning.

From the research it appeared that there are simply two main contributors to the concept of fun. In order to be considered fun an individual needed to have an experience and positive interactions with information or other individuals (Tews et al., 2017). In other words, people simply need to have positive interactions (whether internally or externally) during experiences to consider something "fun." This makes the idea of measuring fun viable. It also makes including fun not only possible, but potentially easy to implement for the classroom teacher. The

definition of fun as related to this study simply added the requirement that the activity be related to the content that would later be assessed in either a formative or summative manner.

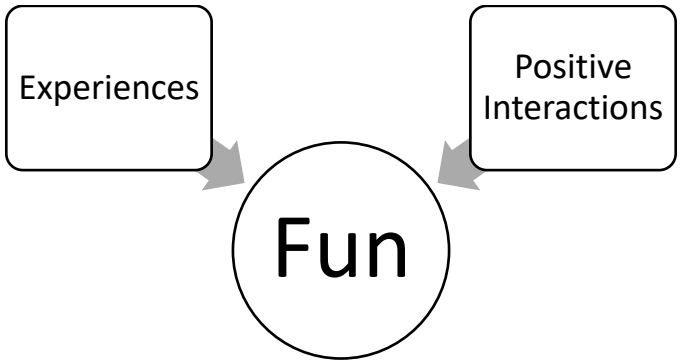

Figure 7. Contributing factors to fun.

This realization then led to the hypothesis that having fun could act a bit like a super-catalyst in that it allows a student to learn despite any deficiencies in any of the aforementioned areas. For example, suppose a person participates in the game of Monopoly and is "having fun." By the end of the game they will have learned how to deal with money, negotiate, avoid pitfalls, strategically purchase things and get out of jail. These concepts can in a sense be viewed as authentic learning that can be used in other areas of life. This is learning that has been garnered in a recreational manner and during a period of fun in the experiences of the participants. There were no reasons for the participants to be concerned about their self-perceptions related to their intelligence. The environment around them would have had minimal or no impact on them. Physical limitations or health would probably not have been a priority, and potentially not even noticed, during the process. In fact, having fun may have had a positive, enduring impact on those areas.

These perceptions prompted the following questions, "What if students had fun during a lesson in a subject they do not enjoy?" and "Is it possible that fun could be a catalyst of sorts to

overcoming an indefinite number of barriers to learning?" The research of Tews et al. (2017) and Fluegge (2008) provided the backdrop of fun as a support for informal learning. The study allowed me to delve a bit further and examine teacher perceptions when fun is used to impact formal learning.

The theory is that the impact of fun produces positive responses that are more valuable to the learner than any attachment to the negative barriers. The recreational aspect allows the participants to mentally and emotionally distance themselves from the potential negatives they feel when they think about "school." There is not just "learning" but rather "authentic learning" as they participate in the activity. Emotions involved with fun are positive and help mitigate negativity, resistance and self-defeating behaviors.

Additionally, according to Pink (2011) the motivation to participate is intrinsic and needs no "carrots" nor "sticks" to induce involvement in the learning activity and therefore the learning itself. Figure 8 reflects the premise of the theory behind the study. Fun develops, nurtures or creates three impetus that positively impact learning and help overcome traditional barriers for students.

This information and focus led to a hypothesis that was based on professional readings, reflections and input from students and educators. For the purpose of this research study "fun" is defined as an activity or experience that produces a positive response in the participant. This definition is a measurable concept based on the research. The hypothesis is related to the role of the explicit inclusion of fun in learning. If instruction includes a fun, engaging hook, students will pay more attention to the lesson; and if they participate in a fun, engaging activity that is related to the learning they will have better retention (Burgess, 2012).

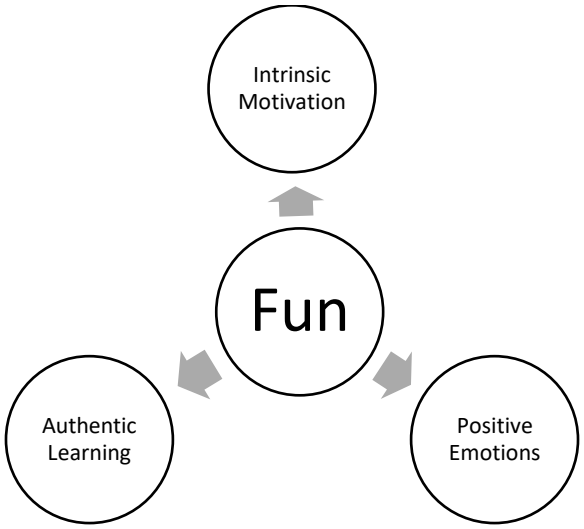

Figure 8. Fun as a catalyst to overcome learning barriers

The literature review, reflections, and professional conversations honed the focus and supported the hypothesis. There was much information about each of the aspects, but there were no comprehensive studies to assess multiple components.

However, Kalogiannakis and Touvlatzis (2015) found that emotions are preeminent in learning; and there is research that demonstrates that optimism is a good predictor of possible success when evaluated against other variables (Bennedsen & Caspersen, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the most compelling and interesting factor comes from the conclusion of Immordino-Yang (2016) "Put succinctly, we only think about things we care about" (p. 18). What this means is that when students do not care about the topic, educators must find ways get them engaged enough so that it becomes important enough for the learners to choose to think about the content.

With circumstances as they are, more and more resources will be spent on just trying to get students to come to school and engage which simply diverts money and energy from the classroom itself (Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). Programs that target one skill or ability (i.e., literacy programs, behavior programs, college-readiness programs) are expensive and

underfunded (Odden, Archibald, & Fermanich, 2005). Mader (2015) reflects that as districts try new programs, overburdening teachers and administrators in terms of workload and filling available time with new work without removing any prior expectations, issues of cost and losses of other activities in the classroom and school become insurmountable. Issues with fidelity and implementation also thwart the efforts of educators and diminish or eliminate possible success (Mader, 2015).

The work of Immordino-Yang (2016) would suggest students are not thinking about learning because they are not interested in the information. Tews et al. (2017) state their fundamental premise as "fun is a key antecedent of informal learning" (p. 47) and follow up with the observation that "fun may be considered recreational" (p. 47) which then may not be viewed by the learner as "learning."

Having fun during instruction has the potential to counteract many of the barriers to learning for this specific reason. Students will not realize they are learning because the recreational atmosphere acts as a smokescreen of sorts to what is really going on cognitively. Future research must include the inclusion of fun as correlated to learning and academic achievement. Pink (2011) has attempted to convince the academic and business communities that motivation has changed over time and needs to be addressed in how teachers instruct and lead in order to trigger intrinsic motivation in new and innovative ways.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of fun as an intentional instructional strategy. Since students respond to what is presented to them in the learning environment, this makes the instructor, and his or her perceptions, the primary factor that influences student behavior in the classroom (Lemov et al.,

2016). Simply stated, what the teacher does from the student perspective impacts how the student reacts, and therefore learns, or does not, what is presented. The work of Tews et al. (2017) found that there are increases in informal learning when fun is utilized, and this is due to the "psychological conditions of safety, availability and meaningfulness" (p. 54). These findings may be extrapolated to formal learning.

The perceptions of teachers in these areas may allow the specific role of fun to be a catalyst that triggers many of the positive aspects of the social-emotional ties to learning that was demonstrated for informal learning (Tews et al., 2017). Potentially, "having fun" will act as a primary motivator and push learning barriers to the background or out of the picture as students interact with the lesson. If having fun can cause students to temporarily suspend negative barriers they may have in terms of ability or self-perception, potentially they can learn before the barriers kick in and therefore develop new perceptions about learning and/or about themselves in relation to learning.

Durant (1926) based on his understanding of the work of Aristotle has been credited with the creation of the belief that excellence and success are habits that can be developed. If students find success repeatedly while having fun, new habits can be created and learning nurtured. The key will be for the teachers to explicitly show the students what they have learned, and more importantly, how they learned so that they can duplicate the experience, and hopefully the success. Perceptions of teachers drive their instruction (Lemov et al., 2016). How teachers emotionally feel about *what* they teach can vary based on their internal perceptions about *how* they teach. Perceptions teachers have about students and learning can vary from subject to subject, period to period, and student to student (Burgess, 2012). The focus group and

interviews helped to identify and delineate the perceptions of teachers in general, and the results are scalable and can be extrapolated to other subjects and areas.

The discussions about thoughts and expressions related to learning gains, behavior, engagement, and other like factors, helped to spur recognition of behaviors and results. Teachers are quick to identify what they perceive as positives and negatives in the instructional arena but are seldom asked to delve deeper into the back ground, reasons and contributing factors that create the positivity or negativity. During the study, it was important to identify new themes that surfaced in the information gathered from the participants and determine the relevance of those themes in terms of impact on the analysis and conclusions that come from the process. The inclusion of fun in instruction has been subjective due to the belief that fun is recreational (Fluegge, 2008), but the study explores fun as an effective instructional strategy.

Fun has been studied primarily in the workplace in terms of the impact on informal learning rather than formal, academic learning. Additionally, what teachers find fun, and what students find fun, can differ significantly. The questions about the changes in teacher perception on instruction and/or student learning when fun is included are topics the participants discussed as they responded to questions that explored those themes via interviews, focus group work and observations. It was important to use the observations to give insight into how engaged and interactive the students seemed to be from the observer's perspective to see if teacher perspectives matched student actions.

These areas had not been explored in as specific a fashion individually, nor in terms of being correlational in current educational research. Due to the importance for administrators to increase graduation and attendance rates, and decrease drop-out numbers, (ODE, 2018) there is an ever-increasing number of programs and activities implemented by educators, administrators

and districts with varying degrees of fidelity and success due to the sheer numbers of components and training required to attempt successful implementation (Reis, n.d.).

This study was designed to see if teachers intentionally including fun strategies in instruction is an effective way to make changes in student engagement and learning acquisition. Interviews and observations produced inquiry into the manner in which students learn. The primary supposition of the study was in determining the impact fun has on knowledge acquisition in terms of potentially being a way to overcome barriers to learning as students participate in the learning because it is fun.

Students consciously and subconsciously put up individual and very personal walls and barriers to learning due to preconceived beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about themselves and about learning. The study delves into the idea that the distraction of having fun could push other barriers unconsciously aside and open up the student for learning in ways they have not experienced. Examining the effects from the perspectives of the instructors themselves was the first step in determining the value of pursuing this train of thought in further research. Perceptions shape reality (Barrett, 2018) and therefore understanding and examining the perceptions of teachers was vital to determining the actual impact of fun in terms of realizing true change in the academic arena.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Students often do not enjoy nor value education (Burgess, 2012). However, the exact impact of specific strategies or activities that would be classified as "fun" had not been explored beyond general anecdotal information. In an attempt to understand the impact, this case study of high school teachers who teach a wide variety of subjects allowed exploration of the situation and insight relative to the personal and instructional perspectives and experiences of the teachers. Teachers were invited to reflect on their perceptions of specific strategies and actions related to fun and its explicit role in the planning and implementation of direct instruction. If specific strategies that are fun can be identified as having an impact on academic achievement, the educational community could ostensibly provide meaningful inclusion of activities that improve the experience of students while still meeting the demands of academic growth.

This study reaches into an untapped attribute of learning and instruction, the explicit inclusion of fun in learning as an intentional instructional strategy. A correlation of fun to learning for students who have here-to-for been reluctant learners, or learners whose barriers have historically impeded growth and success, opens new doors to explore in future research to further examine the implications for changing instructional practice. The implications are prodigious. Teachers will potentially be able to transform instruction with relative ease. The hope is that students will find success more easily and recognize the importance of developing habits of positivity towards learning and, consequently, school.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms provide the definitions of the pertinent terms in this study. It also addresses and/or clarifies vocabulary with multiple meanings or interpretations as to the specific definitions as utilized in this study.

Academic achievement. This term is used in the educational community to describe the level of ability on an aggregate or disaggregated scale. Student academic achievement is measured most often by summative assessments (Steinmayr et al., 2018).

Assessment. This term refers to the tool(s) used to gather data to determine student academic achievement and growth (Stamper, 2018).

Emotions. This term refers to the feelings that impact an individual in their ability to participate in an educational situation (Psychology Today, n.d.).

Engagement. This term refers to the level of a student's interaction with the curriculum (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016).

Extrinsic motivation. This term refers to behavior that is driven by external rewards such as prizes, points, treats or positive, public recognition (Pink, 2011).

Fun. This term refers to instruction that provides a positive experience for the students during a standards-based lesson conducted by a teacher. This term refers to the intentionally positive and engaging method(s) by which a teacher conveys information to the learners (Steinmayr et al., 2018).

Intrinsic motivation. This term refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards because it is satisfying for the individual and the individual is inclined to participate or produce work without any additional action or items provided by the teacher or other entity (e.g., parents, school) (Pink, 2011).

Learning. This term refers to the retention of knowledge for use in authentic situations whether academic or in the real world (Steinmayr et al., 2018).

Motivation. This term refers to that which encourages an individual to do something or behave in a certain way (Steinmayr et al., 2018).

Perception. This term refers to the resulting thoughts, determinations or judgments of a person after an event or situation as filtered through their personal lens through which they experienced it (Steinmayr et al., 2018).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The limitations, delimitations, and assumptions were primarily impacted by the geographic and enrollment circumstances of the school due to the fact it is the only high school in the district.

Limitations. The results cannot be extrapolated to the greater population outside of the geographic area due to the small sample size in a small geographic location. While the case study delves deeper into the phenomenon or experience, it limits the information available. By being a process with boundaries the information is contained within the case study (Yin, 2009). Conclusions and extrapolations may be drawn in a general sense; however, they cannot clearly state a statistical significance commonly found in quantitative research.

This case study involved 12 teachers who voluntarily participated in a program to intentionally include fun in instruction. It was limited by their willingness, time, and ability to complete the tasks. There was also no control group, so there was not a way to correlate or determine conclusive cause and effect. It was about perceptions of teachers, not numerical data or other quantifiable input. According to Yin (2009) "a case study need not contain a complete or accurate rendition of actual events; rather, its purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate" (p. 2).

Delimitations. The scope of this case study was the perceptions of a voluntary group of 12 high school teachers in a semirural town in Oregon relative to the intentional inclusion of fun in instruction, and their specific intentional actions and activities chosen as vehicles by which

they include fun in their instruction. To maintain a manageable study, the research included interviews, observations and a focus group discussion. The interviews and focus group discussion were recorded for accuracy and transcripted. All recordings were destroyed after transcription. Observations were discussed with the teachers as well to add any additional insights from the teachers' perspectives. This study does not include a statistical analysis of student grades, scores, or abilities. The study was being conducted in a small town with only one high school. The participants were voluntary and may not exactly reflect the proportions of the constituency of the entire faculty.

Assumptions. It is assumed that the teachers involved are professional educators with experience in lesson delivery, assessment, and engagement strategies. Teachers in this study were instructed in the implementation of fun in the same manner and stated an intent to implement fun in all classes involved. It is assumed that all classes involved, as general-education classes, include students of all levels of ability (including special education students who have been mainstreamed), behavioral, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The teachers involved are also assumed to be honest in the reporting of their observations and perceptions. The definition of fun for the purpose of this study will have been shared, and therefore there will be an assumption of a common understanding of the concept as it relates to instruction and learning.

Summary

This case study was conducted to find information about student learning as related to the explicit, intentional, strategic inclusion of fun in instruction. It fills a gap in the research in terms of studies related to academic success and instructional impact on learning. Prior research delved into emotions, instructional strategies, motivation, student and teacher perceptions in

multiple areas, but not the intentional, strategic use of fun as an instructional tool. The study explored the possibility of a simple, yet powerful, phenomenon of the ways that fun might be able overcome behavioral and learning barriers and level the academic playing field for all learners. This study uncovered evidence that would suggest that there are other "side effects" such as higher levels of student engagement, better results in assessments, and increases in satisfaction of teachers and students, that might be beneficial as students have more fun in school. Chapter 2 discusses the prior research and current theories related to the study and identifies the gaps in the literature that make the study relevant to the academic community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

The literature related to learning and academics, and related emotional relevance is extensive and comprehensive. Since the work of Dewey (1916), the basis for this study's conceptual framework, there have been multitudes of researchers trying to answer the basic questions about how to motivate learners and how to facilitate learning. This literature review has two components. A brief review of the literature that helped to determine the nature and scope of the problem to be solved (engaging and motivating students to learn) and then the comprehensive review of the literature related to the study based on the key words and concepts searched. There are several components that are far beyond the locus of control of any individual teacher, and so those components did not get explored in the secondary review of pertinent literature.

The process began with a search for relevant research using the search terms: *learning, learning experiences, motivation, engagement, instruction, teachers, modeling, curriculum, emotions, self-perception*, and *fun*. A preliminary review through ERIC and the Concordia University library resources revealed extensive research of the larger set of components involved in learning and motivation. Areas that impact learning include but are not limited to: home/outside support, learning disabilities, gaps in scaffolding of concepts, self-perception, motivation, personal choices (procrastination, sleep, nutritional choices), issues with authority or adults, peer issues, distractions, basic needs not being met, poor instruction, among other issues.

Several of these components are far beyond the locus of control of a classroom teacher. Therefore, factors that were not directly related to the classroom and teacher were eliminated from further searches. Emotions, motivation, and effective instruction rose to the top of the list

in terms of being areas that a classroom teacher could impact via effective instruction and appropriate behavioral supports. The studies related to emotions and cognition support learning theory (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016), but it was difficult to find a way to separate cognition from learning in the literature in such a way as to support a study of any manageable size.

There were studies about emotions in general as related to learning, engagement in general, and motivation in general. This allowed a refinement in search parameters to look specifically for research related to fun as an intentional strategy and/or the impact of learning and/or academic success. A secondary review revealed a significant gap in the research in these two areas. Key words used in the searches were as follows: learning, motivation, effective instruction, emotions, self-perception, and fun. There were no studies that explicitly investigate the roll of fun in learning as an intentional strategy. Fun as a concept, fun as a feeling, fun as an aspect of play, all of these have been thoroughly explored. Explicit inclusion of fun as an instructional strategy was not found, even with multiple searches using the keywords: fun, fun and learning, fun and academic success, fun in instruction, and fun as a learning tool. Thus, an opportunity to include new information to the academic community in this area is clearly available for this study.

What is known from research is that school leaders tend to struggle with student engagement (Dynarski, 2018). While not a new problem, it has reached new levels of dysfunction that are impacting all stakeholders and aspects of education. Motivation as studied by Pink (2013) and engagement can be elusive in the research related to learning. The repercussions of a lack of motivation are trickling into society and causing paradigm shifts in students as compared to prior generations that administrators and teachers are ill-equipped to manage (Fallis, 2003; Pink, 2013). The changes are as diverse as the students involved. What

has not changed over time, from the age of Socrates to Dewey (1916) and continuing right up to the work of Packer (2013), is the overarching perception there is an inherent obligation for educators to socialize and prepare the future citizenry. Unfortunately, ever since the Nation at Risk report (USDE,1983), educators have been accused of failing in all regards and then try to figure out how to motivate students to participate in and benefit from their educational opportunities. Educators buy programs (literacy, mathematics, social-emotional, character building-virtues based, and others) and implement them. Teachers are trained in hopes that they will feel equipped to attack the differing areas of negative data (Dolev & Leshem, 2016).

According to the theory of self-determination (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999), lack of interest in learning, valuing education, and/or student confidence must be taken into consideration. Burgess (2012) has transformed low-SES, at-risk classrooms into high-performing, engaged students and espouses the idea that there must be an emotional component in order to engage students. The issue of boredom must be conquered in order to effectively encourage students to enthusiastically reengage in the academic process (Dolev & Leshem, 2016). The problems at the base of this study were firstly, that is it unclear how the perceptions of teachers related to the role of fun impact their instruction, and secondly that the academic impact of the explicit inclusion of fun in instruction was unknown.

Currently, it appears that education has degenerated into an isolated, unimaginative, and futile exercise in forcing everyone to prove basic skills, regardless of individual extenuating circumstances. There is no sense of a greater connection to society, nor a desire to do anything other than “finish” the process in order to be free to be the individual they choose, regardless of the effect on others or society as a whole. The lack of connection to school and education would seem to be a contributing factor to the loss of connection to society (Packer, 2013). The need to

get students involved in their own learning is a pressing and politically volatile prerequisite for successful schools.

After determining the areas within a teacher's locus of control that could contribute to a study, the primary concepts of learning, motivation, emotions and fun as related to academic success became the subjects of deeper investigation. Each concept was viewed as an individual theme under the overarching umbrella of fun as related to learning and instruction. Learning, in and of itself, is a complex process that is enhanced through supporting factors (Immordino-Yang, 2016) and the results of the research show that the themes need more supporting research in each area, because there were no studies that worked with any correlations specifically related to fun as an intentional strategy.

Motivation has changed over time and is now spurred on by a counter-intuitive set of necessary components in order to thrive (Pink, 2013). Emotions contribute to the success or failure of every human endeavor and fun triggers many positive emotions that contribute to learning (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000). In this research study these components were viewed in the light of an overlapping matrix of concepts that create—at the center—authentic learning. Authentic learning requires mental and emotional investment by the learner in not only the information, but also the process by which they acquire the information (Pink, 2011). Higher-level thinking skills and critical thinking processes become vehicles of thought that students can repeat and develop an affinity for use and growth in the future (Dolev & Leshem, 2016). Everyone is able to learn, but not everyone believes they can learn (Dweck, 2007). This is the crux of the issue. Personal beliefs can make or break a student's potential for academic success.

The literature brought many suggestions for improving different characteristics, or symptoms, of the issues in learning. However, attempting to address all of the areas as "stand

alone" concepts is an illogical, untenable and ineffective way to solve the problem. The more programs administrators expect a teacher to implement and a student to follow, the more likely it is that many of them will simply not be effective as the burden causes overwork and a decrease in motivation as learning moves from a positive experience to a prison of programs and paperwork with high stakes punishments if not completed appropriately.

The literature is prevalent and clear that emotions affect learning, and fun and play create positive responses toward activities and actions (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Therefore, in order to develop a workable research study , the following concepts were investigated in the existing literature: teachers eliminating traditionally fun projects and activities in order to include more direct instruction to meet required standards; student perceptions related to fun in school and learning, the impact of emotions on student achievement levels; intrinsic motivation in students as related to school and learning; student self-perceptions as related to school and learning; and factors that impact students and their ability or desire to learn (Pink, 2013). The ultimate research question was developed from gaps in the literature related to the intentional inclusion of fun as related to learning, academic success, and the removal or reduction of social-emotional barriers via the individual and personal distraction from negatives that fun can alleviate (Tews et al., 2017).

One of the laments related to education is the loss of "fun" in exchange for "more instructional time" that attempts to hammer content into brains that are not all wired the same (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016). Experts in different areas have shared information that should have revolutionized education long ago, and yet teachers still struggle. For example, Pink (2011) demonstrates that teachers should throw away the motivation manuals that were created during the "carrots and sticks" generations that came before. Pink (2013) has done extensive research

that tells us that people intrinsically want to learn given the right components in their learning experiences, this is supported by the work of Immordino-Yang (2016) that identifies the affective realm of emotional motivation as a symbiotic construct with neural, cognitive activity that can be a contributor to multiple internal motivations.

Educators today do a poor job of cultivating an atmosphere that embraces all of the components that support learning. School cultures have become deterrents to community as isolationism, bullying, depression, and emotionally challenged students have become the norm. Immordino-Yang (2016) has research that shows the impact of neuroscience on learning, and yet educators isolate each part of learning as separate factors, rather than an intertwined relationship between emotions, self-perception, past experiences and current impetus from teachers and school leadership (Dolev & Leshem, 2016).

Apathy can be a symptom of a low or nonexistent work ethic. Minimal effort and work are a common concern for teachers. Ruíz (1997) describes effort and the appropriate ways to confront internal struggles in human kind by "doing our best" at all times. This is not a common perspective in American culture any more. U.S. history is full of examples of a united desire as a nation to progress and advance. When President Kennedy addressed the nation in terms of a desire to beat the Russians to the moon, school leaders (and the students in them) promptly increased math and science programs and began the race for space. There are no rallying calls that are answered in that way any longer.

Current society propagates an atmosphere where living vicariously through social media, making fun of others, finding the easy way out, and using others is the norm (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Our students limit themselves in so many ways, and parents and teachers who want to push against the stream are hard-pressed to figure out how to do that (Dolev & Leshem, 2016).

Dweck (2007) encourages us to cultivate a "growth mindset" to combat many of these ills. The science she brought together verifies that an individual can learn to learn to infinite levels of difficulty. An anecdotal example of this was stated at a faculty discussion a few years ago about requiring all students to take Advanced Placement Language Arts.

The literature addresses aspects of the human experience, and yet, apathy from the students grows, frustration from the educators grows, and the academic system continues to stagnate (Dolev & Leshem, 2016). The research related to student boredom, includes a lot of information about motivation, effort, and mindset (Pink, 2011; Tews et al., 2017). However, there is a void in the area of emotions that directly impact learning and engagement. This would indicate that a foundational piece of academic puzzle could possibly be discovered within the constructs of this study.

There is no singular source in the research related to emotions as connected specifically to student achievement. Many emotions are discussed in relation to learning (Emmanuel, 2016). However, the sheer number of emotions and correlating influences are too varied to design a feasible, coherent study (Immordino-Yang, 2016). At that point in the research, the idea of an action or activity that might be a catalyst for the positive emotions that encourage learning became the focus of the search for information. The outcome was the development of a hypothesis that fun, in and of itself, could be an entry-level, emotion-triggering, concept that might overcome barriers and facilitate, engagement, learning and knowledge retention. The premise of the study was that while experiencing fun a student will not be focusing on their deficiencies, but rather simply enjoying the experience, learning as they have fun, without experiencing or recognizing the barriers they allow to deter them in their normal "school" actions. The belief is that they will learn without realizing it, until after the fun has done its job.

This literature review is of course by no means exhaustive, but rather it is an attempt to be complete in the coverage of each of the primary concepts that found in the literature related to fun in learning. The absence of literature that is directly aligned with the questions has encouraged the creation of a process by which each of the components can be incorporated into the study in order to fill that gap in the research community.

Conceptual Framework

Dewey (1916) had a down-to-earth logic related to human nature, learning, and the role of education in the life of the individual as well as in society: "Were all instructors to realize that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked" (p. 201). Dweck (2007) provides the backdrop for the growth mindset that allows learners to change and develop their minds to acquire new learning. This concept is vital to the study in that it is my belief that students and teachers can learn in new and interesting ways that allow them to grow in self-belief and increase positive self-perceptions as learners and educators. A growth mindset belief is vital to the role of perceptions. The work of Pink (2013) related to motivation and the need for individuals to have some control over the process, the task, or the people with whom they will work; and the work of Burgess (2012), which requires passion and creativity on the part of educators, touch on the intrinsic and motivational aspects of the study. The work of Dewey (1916), Dweck (2007), Pink (2013), and Burgess (2012) provided the research background necessary for the study, and there are no more recent studies in these areas that support the study. These researchers provide the foundation of the conceptual framework of the literature review and guide the study.

The “whole child” concept was introduced by Dewey (1916), and perpetuated throughout the literature via the work of Jones (2003), Oxford (2015), Plester, Cooper-Thomas and Winquist (2015), and Gagnon (2016), among others, is often used in layman vernacular on a regular basis as districts design programs to address the ever-increasing needs of children as societal organizations report increases areas that negatively impact education. There are many issues that have always been a part of society but have grown to such staggering statistics that they now burden an already saturated educational plate for which educators and administrators must compensate (Dolev & Leshem, 2016). The areas explored in the research in this area were: poverty, homelessness, mobility, social development, domestic abuse, special educational needs, mental health issues, and biological issues as discussed in the work of Aydogdu, Celik, and Eksi. (2017). These issues were reviewed in the literature to inform the study.

On the social front, poverty contributes to homelessness which drives mobility in families. This causes children to change schools far too often and potentially miss months of a school year in terms of learning as they enter classes that may be covering something they have not learned or working with new information. Couple this with the social issues that come when trying to develop relationships with new teachers, peers, and neighbors and a student who struggles will encounter multiple barriers they must overcome.

Another significant contributor unfortunately includes domestic abuse and other home situations that cause such stress on children who live in these circumstances (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). This can include physical abuse, verbal abuse and mental abuse, including neglect. Children come to school having not eaten or not sleeping due to physical discomfort or emotional fear of the circumstances. The effects can seem almost insurmountable as children shut down and shut out life and learning as a self-defense mechanism (Emmanuel, 2016).

Special education needs are well-documented, and the population has significant protection and advocacy that has been made into laws that relate to school management via what began as the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and is now known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (USDE, 2016). Special education needs can create social stigma, but also, the simple fact that the students experience issues in their learning that cannot be compensated for in a regular-ed manner increases the difficulty for teachers to reach every child.

Mental health issues and biological issues such as autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are continuous and ever-changing targets for educators to navigate with their students (Healthy Place, 2016; Kids Matter, 2013). Disconnected programs from multiple sources (public, private, nonprofit, for-profit, faith-based) try to address these issues as well as the lack or absence of pre-academic skills in children entering kindergarten (Holloway, 2003). The research is exhaustive in each of these areas as unique constructs. There is however, no discussion about the impact having fun as an instructional strategy might alleviate or ameliorate some of these contributors to educational issues in students.

When brought together, these diverse areas provide the backdrop for an overarching need for education to be about improving oneself in order to improve society in relation to the logical tenets of scientific and anecdotal evidence related to learning (Packer, 2013). So, with that in mind, this framework set the stage for this study. The work should develop a way to inspire and support logical, motivated, life-long learners (Tews et al., 2017). However, in order to get to that point, there are a few areas that can be addressed according to the literature.

The studies show that there are myriad reasons why students are disengaged in the educational process. There were many resources to review and investigate for each concept and this provided ample opportunity to hone the research into categories and concepts that would inform the hypothesis. All of the research related to this study finds foundation in the words of Burgess (2012), "Teaching is no longer about relaying the content standard . . . it's about transforming lives. It's about killing apathy. It's about helping the next generation fulfill their potential and become successful human beings" (p. 10).

In short, the result of the study would hopefully indicate that the impact of fun creates a domino effect from the individual, to the class, to the school, to the community, eventually culminating with an impact on society as a whole. Life is so much more than school. But life is incomplete without learning. That is why finding a way to make learning something that is sought after and enjoyed is so important. Teachers need the next generation to want to learn, explore and grow. The fact that educational reform continues to fail even when every aspect in the literature has been addressed in the reforms would indicate that the research has produced programs and systems designed to attack the symptoms of the problems, not the ultimate source.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The review of research literature reflects the topics explored in the study. The methodological literature review addresses the research related to case studies and other pertinent research strategies.

Review of research literature. The literature review was categorized as follows: learning, motivation, effective instruction, emotions, self-perception, and fun. Each area is supported by multiple sources that are compiled in each of the following subsections. The research presented is from the primary sources that are most relevant in terms of content and how

recent the work was conducted in order to include the most contemporary thought and research in the greater academic community as related to student achievement and fun.

Learning. Yoo and Carter (2017) argued that both teaching and learning are inherently emotional activities. Lykke, Coto, Jantzen, Mora, and Vandal (2015) go one step further to add the physiological role in the learning experience because the actual learning experiences differ and push the individual to grow in multiple areas as they do so. Learning is contingent on many factors and the research shows that it builds upon itself along a continuum that builds on itself (Driscoll & Powell, 2016).

Marzano et al. (2010) explained that everything one does, or experiences becomes a part of permanent memory and contributes to learning. Learning in and of itself is a complex process that is enhanced through multiple, intertwined, supporting factors (Oxford, 2015). There is a difference between the action of learning and the actions of wanting and liking (Berridge, Robinson, & Aldridge, 2009). Therefore, educators must ensure they are helping to connect those variables. If a student likes what they are doing, they will want to do it more, and if it involves new information, they will, as a result, learn.

There is a need for scaffolding and the development of critical thinking skills in students from a very young age (Marzano et al., 2010). Logical processing must be identified, explained to students and nurtured (Dewey, 1933) in order to foster the acquisition of needed knowledge and skills. This will allow students to develop the ability they need for continuous growth (Barrett, 2018). Ripp (2016) supported innovative teaching but also notes that it is important to not overwhelm students with workload or information overload. Gaps in learning can have many roots including mobility, poor instruction, and social/emotional issues. These create difficulties for scaffolding and instruction and students often have developed coping strategies

that inhibit participation due to self-perception issues (Zorba, Pala, & Göksel, 2016). All of these factors impact the role of instruction and the process of learning.

Learning experiences are as varied as the teachers and students who participate in them. These experiences are most powerful when students can directly relate them to their lives, other people, or other experiences (Solarz, 2015). These relationships made with people and things outside of themselves foster a deeper level of learning and retention. They also allow students to make connections and develop higher-level thinking skills as well as increase social-emotional growth (Lykke et al., 2015). Learning is significantly increased when there is a belief in the ability from the learner's perspective that they can learn (Aragão, 2011) and their level of maturity and ability to understand what they are being asked to learn (Argon & Sezen- Gültekin, 2016). In other words, when a student is mentally and emotionally ready and believes that they can learn, he or she will be able to do so more readily than if any one of those things is missing or incomplete.

Learning in the context of this study was the goal, not just rote memorization or parroting of information, but rather meaningful and authentic learning. This kind of response to the teacher and the instruction has traditionally been hit and miss, but the attempt with this study was to find a way to promote this kind of authentic and engaged learning as a norm in schools and not an anomaly (Solarz, 2015). The research has gaps in these areas that are addressed in the study. Should the study provide evidence of the role of fun as a viable alternative to some other programs or systems, the implications could be widespread in the educational community.

Motivation. Students are not just disengaged in school (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014) but rather, they are unmotivated in many areas which has prompted research and studies related to motivation. Motivation has changed over time and is now spurred on by a counter-intuitive set

of necessary components in order to thrive because the carrots and sticks used in education in the past only work when the task at hand is rudimentary (Pink, 2011). In fact, Deci et al. (1999) determined categorically that tangible rewards significantly decrease intrinsic motivation and verbal rewards or other non-tangible things that made people feel better increased it. As the pre-eminent scholar of motivation in the current age, the research of Pink (2013) spans over many decades and he delineates the three attributes that foster intrinsic motivation: autonomy over the task, team, or timeframe; the ability to master the subject/activity; and a clear understanding of the purpose.

Learners both young, and not-so-young, want control over these things in order to care about what they are doing. Only once they find personal reasons or connections do they become intrinsically motivated (Pink, 2013). The past cultural values of obeying one's elders, respecting authority, and compliance with teachers, bosses, and leaders have been replaced with new impetuses that encourage us as human beings to challenge and question everything as a basic part of critical thinking. The paradox is that teachers need critical thinking, but critical thinking actually challenges our need for critical thinking in the first place (Kang, 2015).

Pink's (2011) research reveals that people want to know why they have to know something before they choose to subject themselves to the authority of those who would try to educate them. Pink's (2013) work coupled with the work of Lykke et al. (2015) suggests students are more often motivated to learn in general rather than about specifics unless they have a reason of their own for going deeper into the idiosyncrasies and details of the learning. This fact increases the value and need of developing intrinsic motivation to learn tremendously. Immordino-Yang (2016) makes it clear that people only think effectively about what they care about; however, that can be mitigated or exacerbated depending on task difficulty (Basturk,

2016) or engagement (Marzano et al., 2010). Burgess (2012) targets the passion of the instructor and the inclusion of instructional hooks as necessary motivators for statistically significant change in motivation to learn new content. All of these perspectives are aimed in the same direction and support the premise that intrinsic motivation and passion are necessary and powerful when it comes to learning.

Emotions motivate, positively and negatively (Oxford, 2015), and the ability to trigger the positive emotions that can initiate intrinsic motivation in a student is the key. Fun creates a natural, pressure-free, environment for positive emotions and natural, authentic engagement and motivation (Plester & Hutchison, 2016). There is no current research quantifying a relationship or correlation of behaviors in terms of fun specifically impacting an intrinsic motivation to learn. Neither is there research to support anecdotal observations and teacher gut feelings about the subject. However, the conclusion has been drawn that comfortable, informal, interactive learning environments better support intrinsic motivation and authentic learning (Denson, Hailey, Stallworth, & Householder, 2015). Therefore, the gaps in the research support more investigation into the idea that having fun and triggering positive emotions may be a catalyst over barriers for the manifestation of intrinsic motivation in the learners.

There is a correlation related to motivation in this study. Having fun is viewed as participating in a positive experience, and positive learning experiences are motivating (Lykke et al., 2015). Additionally, Deci et al. (1999) suggested issues such as alienation and detachment can be mitigated by increases in intrinsic motivation. Once a sense of passion or excitement is ignited, other positive intrinsic motivators begin to emerge (Ripp, 2016). These facts support the quest to include positive learning experiences via fun activities as a way to spur and then nurture intrinsic motivation in the learners.

Effective instruction. Teachers need to be effective in instruction (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Passion, intrigue, and fun from the teacher foster the same in the students (Burgess, 2012). Additionally, it is important to remember that students who experience their learning through activities retain learning better than when simply reading, writing, or hearing about the topic (Davis & Leslie, 2015). With all of these assumptions that are supported in the research, it is easy to take things for granted and assume that all teachers know how to instruct effectively and understand all of the nuances that can make the difference between attending school and actually learning new information while in class. Teachers can cultivate passion, innovation, and talent in students (Couros, 2015). However, instruction can deter learning and diminish joy in the learning process creating disengagement from the topic, the teacher, the subject, and eventually disconnect students from the entire educational process.

Instruction has been investigated for years and is constantly being reinvented or recycled in new programs based on the latest educational theories and studies. Effective instruction has been determined to be one of the primary contributors to student academic success. There are four main factors included in the concept of effective instruction in the research: student perceptions of teachers, effective instructional strategies, modeling, and standards-based curriculum. El Sharif (2016) shares that students respond better to instruction when they have favorable perceptions of the teachers; which dovetails nicely with the role of passion in teachers as purported by Burgess (2012).

Argon and Sezen-Gültekin (2016) research supports the converse idea that students do not listen to nor enjoy classes taught by teachers they do not like or respect. The primary characteristics of teachers that have been found to increase student perception are enthusiasm (Burgess, 2012), careful planning, specific instructional strategies (Marzano et al., 2010), and the

ability to help students make sense of complex ideas (Begum & Khan, 2015). As the research demonstrates, there are many areas in which a teacher can fail to be what the students want or need. Burnout among teachers is often stimulated by negative emotional experiences while teaching (Yilmaz, Altinkurt, Guner, & Sen, 2015) and emotional exhaustion is a primary culprit. This informs the study in that there is hope that a positive emotional experience for the students may also be a positive emotional experience for the teacher.

When so much rides on the abilities of the teachers, it is easy to see how there can be so many variations in experience for students. Even in the same school in the same subject, students who take U.S. History with teacher X can potentially have a totally different learning experience than students with teacher Y. Nass and Yen (2012) show clearly that computers can be taught to interact with humans and change behaviors in the subjects. The presumption from their work is basically the idea that if a computer can elicit predictable and positive reactions in humans, there are ways for humans to do likewise. Due to this understanding about computers and the correlation to sociological phenomenon, this study includes activities that should be similar for all students regardless of the instructor, in order to see if teacher personality can be mitigated as a negative factor. Effective instruction needs to be less about personality and charisma, and eliminate as many subjective attributes as possible, and therefore, hopefully, produce manageable activities and processes that can be implemented by anyone and achieve the desired results, in this case, learning (Nass & Yen, 2012).

It should be noted that the topic of effective instruction is not complete without the inclusion of passion. El-Sherif (2016), Burgess (2012) and Marzano et al. (2010) discuss the imperative that teachers who are truly effective demonstrate passion when they teach. The enthusiasm expressed by the teacher often manifests in the students as a result and students value

teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm and care for their subject and their students (El-Sherif, 2016).

Emotions. Emotions contribute to every area of human existence (Barrett, 2018). Emotional Intelligence (EI) has come to the forefront in recent years as a major contributing factor in learning. The higher the EI, the higher the levels of positive emotions (Zorba et al., 2016). Positive emotions contribute to a person's ability to receive and retain information (Blasco et al., 2015). Emotions are related to cognition and learning because usually feelings impact learners first, before they understand concepts (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016).

Emotions impact learning (Immordino-Yang, 2016), in fact they are dominant in the effectiveness of learning (Kalogiannakis & Touvlatzis, 2015). People cannot make memories without emotions. Individuals have no reason to change personal actions or beliefs without an emotional need to do so. Understanding emotionally through intuition comes advance. First, the heart becomes involved, then logic and critical thinking processes clarify the learning issue for the student (Blasco et al., 2015). There is also a need on the part of students to avoid negative experiences simultaneously to having fun (Tews et al., 2017).

How a student feels about the subject, the teacher, the classroom, all of these subjective things are filtered through the student's filters and create a framework that either supports or resists the learning (Yoo & Carter, 2017). Resilience in the face of negative emotions related to learning can help counter act the impetus to resist learning. Self-efficacy helps to mitigate as well. Psychological resilience is partially inherent but can be cultivated and help to overcome emotional and cognitive barriers (Aydogdu, Celik & Eksi, 2017).

The social experience as related to emotions impacts student learning as well because emotions involve complex thinking skills and our actions are often contingent upon our emotions

(Begum & Khan, 2015). Basically, students need emotions for effective social interactions, and they do better in school when those two aspects are positive in their experience. Emotions such as worry destroy hope (Johnston, 2014), and thus there is a need to create environments that nurture and support positive emotional growth and maturity.

Emotions spur the success or failure of every human endeavor. The research comes to interrelated conclusions that provide, at the core, a basis for supporting the position that emotions must be taken into consideration in regard to students and learning. Many of the generalizations that can be made from the research are stated here as summaries from one source, but they are representative of a body of research in each area. Emotions are what allow an individual to experience life. In order to have a positive, happy life, the inclusion of a discussion about the role of emotions in the context of the study is immutable for the reasons that follow.

In terms of motivation, the research posits that positive emotions nurture intrinsic motivation, negatives do the opposite (Oxford, 2015). Emotions directly impact our desire to work, which is also molded by how teachers feel about our work (whether school or real-world), which then influences our ability to do well at the task (Driscoll & Powell, 2016). Therefore, emotions need to be supported in such a way that intrinsic motivation is supported and enhanced. There is a relationship between a positive attitude and increased EI (Begum & Khan, 2015).

How teachers react to anything, including school and learning, is related to our emotional maturity (Hass, 2015) and level of EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1989). These two markers of emotional growth, when strong, positively impact critical thinking, and conversely can damage the ability to think critically when they are absent (Kang, 2015). EI has been defined as the ability to observe the emotions of oneself and others while utilizing these observations in the direction of one's behavior and thinking (Davis & Leslie, 2015). EI growth involves actual

instruction about emotions and EI itself because focusing on and learning about emotional intelligence increases an individual's EI (Dolev & Leshem, 2016). A nice side effect of a high level of EI is that it increases happiness and optimism (Zorba et al., 2016) and happiness fuels success (Achor, 2011). Also, EI levels in teachers significantly impact the educational experience of the students (Yildizbas, 2017), and Begum and Khan (2015) explicitly connect a teacher's ability to connect with student's emotions to the development of higher levels of student EI.

EI instruction must begin early as it is a major component in developing empathy for others (Zorba et al., 2016). Empathy helps students to understand others and forgive them for things that they may have taken personally. The ability to forgive oneself and others impacts the emotional foundation of an individual (Ascioglu & Yalcin, 2017). It is important to teach children the process of forgiveness of themselves and others as part of a healthy mental state of being. As students discuss emotions, learn to identify emotions and name them, they decrease the negative power of emotions that can lead to a negative self-perception (Zorba et al., 2016). A positive growing EI is best supported by a positive social-emotional atmosphere in the learning environment (Gagnon, 2016). Talking about emotions increases the ability to process emotions and develop a higher level of emotional intelligence (Kalogiannakis & Touvlatzis, 2015). This kind of environment fosters optimism and hope which are important attributes for success (Johnston, 2014). Empathy comes easier to those who have an interpersonal sensitivity that comes with relationship development (Aydogdu et al., 2017).

Self-perception. Self-perception and self-esteem are often seen as synonymous, but there is a danger in making that assumption. Self-perception is a contributor to self-esteem. How a student perceives themselves, the image they have of themselves as an individual in the world

they experience daily will feed a positive or negative esteem of themselves. If teachers presume that school leaders need to focus on the whole child and prepare them for the world and society then helping students to have an accurate and healthy self-perception leads to a greater possibility that students will be happier and exercise better critical thinking skills. Adler and Adler (1998) address the role of how a student views and then esteems themselves as capable or incapable. If the perception they have of themselves is positive, they believe they can achieve more. Sunawan and Xiong (2017) posit that self-perception is significantly impacted by the relationships with peers. This is followed by the concept that if one believes in one's own ability, it impacts cognitive processing (Sunawan & Xiong, 2017). There are social indicators that can indicate the level of a person's self-perception and impact the ability of an individual to rise above negative circumstances (Huppert & So, 2013).

Self-perception, and the impact on one's self-esteem, is perhaps one of the greatest contributors to success (Sunawan & Xiong, 2017). It is also one of the most disruptive culprits of negativity and subsequent student failure and therefore should be included in any project designed to improve the academic experience. Self-perception includes the idea of self-efficacy, but also so much more(Hallowell, 2011). Our identities are intertwined with our self-perceptions related to ability, intelligence, relationships, etc. (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017). Our environment also shapes our self-perception (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017). Teachers are what teachers believe they are (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017).

Grit and curiosity are related to resiliency (Tough, 2014). Where people come from, who people come from, where people live, socioeconomic status and many other demographic identifiers all contribute to grit, curiosity, and ultimately personal identity. How people feel about something or someone influences our identity as people label ourselves based on how

people feel about them (Huppert & So, 2013). This is all related to learning due to the fact that emotions, identities and thinking are related intrinsically (Frijda, Manstead, & Bem, 2000). Here too, the concepts overlap. Self-perception's effect on the potential for the future and a positive life. Family cohesion, perception of self, social competence, and social resources all have positive correlations with effectively dealing with emotions (Aydogdu et al., 2017). When those are missing in the life of a young person, it can be detrimental to their learning process. The aim of this study was to determine a connection between students and learning that is not contingent on any of these factors, but rather on a joy in the process that elicits learning and therefore overcome these issues.

When people believe they can learn it increases the efficacy in receiving and processing new information (Basturk, 2016). This allows students to learn more easily when they believe the learning is within grasp of their perceived abilities. Leaders in every field should take into consideration that when people are given tasks that fit into their natural skill set, they do much better and have a far greater likelihood of success (Hallowell, 2011), it becomes important to help students identify areas of strength that they can shine in to develop positive self-perceptions in one area that can then serve as a model for other areas in their lives. Accepting oneself is vital, but it also includes forgiving oneself. Being able to forgive oneself makes a difference in the positive or negative perception an individual has of themselves (Ascioglu & Yalcin, 2017).

The most direct results on learning as related to self-perception have to do with the student's perceptions of their own ability and their emotional connections to the learning process. Immordino-Yang (2016) explains that students' questions and interpretations of their learning are most often directly related to their personal experience. There is a direct correlation between the positive emotional experiences that influence the students' physiological and emotional

wellbeing (i.e. their emotional responses) as well as their active engagement in the learning process (Machera & Machera, 2017). All of these perceptions lead the students down their own "rabbit hole" to figure out how to make meaning of the learning. People create their own realities, and this impacts how they view everything, including teachers, lessons, schools, and peers (Kalogiannakis & Touvlatzis, 2015; Saarni, 1999).

Fun. The simple truth is that students want to have fun (El-Sherif, 2016). While many of the conclusions from research seem obvious, the scientific support for the aspects that impact learning and education specifically help to focus this study. The results of prior studies demonstrate that fun overcomes a plethora of negatives (Plester, Cooper-Thomas & Winquist, 2015), and creates a natural engagement motivation (Plester & Hutchison, 2016). As students have fun and laugh and smile, there is a mental-physical-emotional transformation that pushes negatives out of sight and allows natural experience and authentic learning in the process. Specifically, having fun during physical activity has been shown to increase positivity, enthusiastic participation, extended endurance and longer duration in the process of the physical activity and the participants do not report having a negative response after the fact (El-Sherif, 2016). Additionally, the things that students and teachers find entertaining together helps foster better communication about the topic and a more collaborative, reflective learning process (Blasco et al., 2015).

Humor is often associated with and explicitly involved in fun and can easily be incorporated into instruction. Humor reduces anxiety (Randler, Wüst-Ackermann, & Demirhan, 2016) and allows a natural, casual flow in circumstances that can foster positive interactions, and support activities. Humor has been found to decrease stress and allow creativity to flourish (Nass & Yen, 2012). When people laugh, they are enjoying themselves which then leads to the

positive emotions discussed earlier. Fun triggers many positive emotions that contribute to learning and should not be ignored any longer in the quest to encourage learning.

These components are viewed in the light of an overlapping matrix of concepts that create, at the center, authentic learning. Fun makes a difference in many things. However, there is research that shows that students will put out a lot more energy when they are playing or having fun (Mathers, 2008). Mathers (2008) concluded that teachers need to think about their own beliefs related to fun and learning, and they should include students in discussions about their emotions related to the information and the instruction. Teachers must also be willing to critically assess their willingness to make things more fun for all involved to increase the productivity of the students as well as the enjoyment of the process for all involved. Teachers can harness the power of fun and increase the results in their classes when they include these kinds of activities (Mathers, 2008).

Play is fun, play is intrinsic motivation at its most fundamental level, and therefore the logical assumption is that if people can get students to play when learning, it will become meaningful at a deeper level and the knowledge will be retained for a longer period of time (Eberle, 2014). Plester and Hutchison (2016) discuss the fact that people enjoy "new" things and activities. Fun often elicits a state of "flow" when they are having fun (Moneta, 2012), which contributes to positive emotions and greater possibility of learning and growing in social-emotional ways as well as academically, as demonstrated by the research referred to above. Plester and Hutchison (2016) indicate that flow is more naturally achieved if people are having fun.

The study fits into this untapped niche in the research. As part of the study there is an activity that is a game to play (which, as discussed above, facilitates fun) that involves the

vocabulary of whatever topic is being taught. This is to access a simple concept that Ilter (2016) shared about how knowing the vocabulary related to what students are learning helps them feel more positive and accomplished, and positive interactions is one of the components of fun (which then feeds into the research on self-perception). The research of each component is all interconnected. This study will include activities that connect the different dots of the research to see what the teachers notice and document their perceptions related to each of the major themes in the research. Students want to have fun, but so do the grown-ups (Plester & Hutchison, 2016) and fun generates the positives needed for growth, which means that teachers who include activities that they consider fun and students also find fun are more likely to produce flow in the classroom and achieved the desired result of authentic, long-lasting learning.

Review of methodological literature. Research procedures found in the studies used for this review utilized quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies. Among qualitative studies, phenomenological circumstances and case studies were the primary methods used. Quantitative studies were used primarily to determine or dismiss explicit correlations between studied facets.

Quantitative. Aydogdu et al. (2017) wanted to predict the relationship between emotional self-efficacy and resiliency. Berridge and Kringelbach (2008) and Berridge, Robinson, and Aldridge (2009) did extensive analysis related to the neuroscience behind the emotions related to pleasure and rewards. Neuroscience was also a primary target of the study done by Immordino-Yang (2016) as related to emotions and learning. Barrett (2018) investigated how emotions are made and Johnston (2014) measured hope. Case studies in the quantitative research analyzed specific attributes: humor and anxiety (Randler, Wüst-Ackermann, & Demirhan, 2016); affective domain (Alpen, 1973); resilience and emotional self-

advocacy (Aydogdu et al., 2017); value of fun in physical activity (El-Sherif, 2016); benefits of informal learning environments (Denson et al., 2015); EI as therapy (Machera & Machera, 2017); and EI and critical thinking (Kang, 2015).

Some researchers did reviews and synthesis of prior research, such as the work on motivation by Pink (2011) or the meta-analysis of Deci et al. (1999). Deci et al. analyzed 128 studies related to extrinsic motivation, rewards, and the effect on intrinsic motivation. The authors discovered that the newest model for inspiring intrinsic motivation requires that there be meaningful reasons for the participant, a purpose; the ability to improve or master the concept; and, autonomy in terms of the people one works with, the time one works, and/or the task that one must complete (Pink, 2011). There was no articulated discussion about the role of fun in motivation, and there is no research in the motivation field specific to the role of fun as an explicit instructional strategy.

Qualitative. Almost all of the qualitative studies related to some form of phenomenological study. These studies explored concepts that all contribute to learning, motivation, or emotions. Informal learning environments were explored by Denson et al. (2015) and demonstrated a relationship of the informal experience supporting learning. Eberle (2014) defined play. Dewey (1933) researched education and reflection and his work is still a foundational piece in the research community in terms of reflection as an important part of learning. Emotion, learning, and professional development are all intertwined and must be cultivated (Yoo & Carter, 2017).

A mindset of innovation was investigated and has become an important part of current educational theory (Couros, 2015). Engagement was explored by Ripp (2016) who determined that there are multiple constructs that impact how and when people engage in learning new

information. Burgess (2012) was exhaustive in his work related to the efficacy of adding fun instructional hooks in order to encourage engagement in learning. Motivation from the work of Pink (2013) was followed by Lykke et al. (2015) who's work supports the need for intrinsic motivation in order to have continued investment in the learning process. Flow assists in work (which includes learning) and requires a mindset and level of knowledge or enjoyment to allow individuals to get working and keep working and lose track of time due to the level of engagement (Moneta, 2012). Boredom and anxiety contribute to a general malaise that inhibits learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Emotional connections and well-being enhance learning (Aragão, 2011), (Gagnon, 2016), (Huppert & So 2013). Effective instructional strategies make the biggest difference for students (Blasco et al., 2015) and fun as examined by Tews et al. (2017), Fluegge (2008), Mathers (2008) and Plester et al. (2015) makes an impact on the human experience that cannot be accounted for in any other way. The research was exhaustive in most of these areas, but there was not one study found that explicitly uses fun as a catalyst for learning.

Mixed methods. The mixed methods studies involved surveys and case studies but involved the quantification or measurement of the subject. The relationship between Emotional Intelligence and teacher attitude was clearly established by Begum and Khan (2015) who verified the idea that higher levels of EI and positive teacher attitudes have a quantifiable relationship. Marzano et al. (2010) developed research around engaged classrooms supporting learning. Socio-emotional skills impact learning and contribute to success when a student has healthy and productive skills (McKown, Russo-Ponsaran, & Johnson, 2016). Fun and engagement are directly correlated as demonstrated by the research of Ascioglu Onal and Yalcin (2017). Academic emotions are influenced by many factors (Sunawan & Xiong, 2017).

Overwhelmingly, emotions and/or emotional impact on learning was found to be statistically significant in multiple studies including the foundational work of Haas et al. (2015), Kagan (2008), Frijda and Mesquita (2000), and Fiedler and Bless (2000), but again, there were no explicit studies about fun in these studies.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The interconnection of the themes in this review lead to several generalizations in each area. Succinctly put, learning is complex and has many attributes (Driscoll & Powell, 2016), and each attribute has prompted a lot of research. The research studies delved into the different components of each attribute and the interconnectedness of those components. Many of these attributes have been the focus of research individually as well. In terms of education, motivation has been addressed in some ways via traditional methods such as extrinsic rewards for behavior and attitude, but the new generation requires new ways of implementing instruction to provide intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2013). These findings, while counter-intuitive, are not surprising when looked at in the context of learners today.

Emotions are powerful and can spur optimism and creativity; but conversely can be detrimental to learning when there are negative experiences that cause negative emotions (Barrett, 2018). Dolev and Leshem (2016) completed extensive research on EI and how to identify and describe the EI of an individual. EI level is a predictor for an individual's ability to learn things easily or have more barriers to learning. EI can be developed with direct instruction related to emotions of individuals and helping them to identify their feelings and discuss what they mean and how they should be managed. Emotions themselves are also primary contributors to an individual's self-perception. Emotions can get in the way of one's belief in his or her own

ability to learn, achieve, or find success in general in any given area (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017).

Fun releases stress and anxiety and creates a circumstance that allows for participation and flow that is not contingent on any other aspects of learning (Plester et al., 2015). There is a direct, positive correlation between fun and play and the research supports the incorporation of EI instruction, social-emotional supports, motivational strategies, positive emotions and activities that can be classified as play into schools as interventions to improve academic experiences, growth and success (Eberle, 2014). Fun overcomes negatives (Plester et al., 2015) and creates motivation (Plester & Hutchison, 2016). Humor reduces anxiety and increases the feeling of having fun (Randler et al., 2016) and fosters positive interactions, decreases stress, and encourages creativity (Nass & Yen, 2012). In terms of learning, students will expend more energy when they are playing or having fun (Mathers, 2008) and teachers can access the power of fun by utilizing explicit strategies that inherently are fun and do not rely upon teacher personality or skill.

Critique of Previous Research

There are no quantitative studies that show any measurable correlations specifically between fun and academic success. The previous research is comprehensive in each area as a stand-alone concept, but there are natural connections and variables between fun and learning and the subsequent results in academic success. There are areas that could be connected in the research that simply are not. Emotions are explored, dissected and explained in study after study: Saarni (1999) reviewed emotional competence and EI in self-perception and personal belief; Davis and Leslie (2015) examined the development and growth of EI; and Kang (2015) explored how engaging students enhances critical thinking. The most relevant work was

conducted by Barrett (2018) who determined that emotions are not kept in different parts of the brain and are expressed and recognized in the same ways all the time. Instead, emotion is made in the moment, by primary systems that interact in the whole brain, which is impacted and filtered by a lifetime of learning. The literature supports the supposition that, in general, emotions dominate thoughts. However, there are no studies to show specifically whether or not fun can interrupt the negatives of the emotional realm that then negatively impact learning. There is a void in the research about overcoming emotional barriers to learning with intentionally added, fun activities that address the curriculum and help students learn at a deeper and more meaningful level.

Self-perception is also covered in the literature, much in the same way as emotions are. Unfortunately, there are no studies that show how self-perception is impacted by having fun in the learning process. In terms of academic success, there is room in the research for studies that address low self-esteem, as influenced by self-perception, and study how these concepts may act as a barrier to learning. Future research needs to include studies directed at determining if educators can combat negative self-perception and low self-esteem with fun activities. Motivation research shows a direct correlation between autonomy, purpose and the ability to improve and intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2011). The current research hints at pleasurable experiences but does not become explicit in the summaries of the results in terms of how having fun relates in a quantifiable or qualified manner to learning new content. There is a lot of room for research to identify how having fun impacts motivation related specifically to learning (Tews et al., 2017). The study posits that having fun could be a purpose in and of itself and developing mastery over the action that is fun could be the reason students want to learn new information in spite of individual barriers.

Summary

Student engagement, while not a new problem, is a problem. The repercussions are impacting society and there are new paradigm shifts in students that educators struggle to address (Fallis, 2003). The themes of the literature review were as follows: learning, motivation, effective instruction, emotions, self-perception, and fun as related to academic success. Educators today are hard-pressed to meet the growing needs of a changing student body. Extensive implementation of multiple programs is prohibitive. Typical school culture has become a deterrent, neuroscience has changed the way people look at individuals, apathy is an issue, and the human experience currently is in flux.

The conceptual framework of the study involves the whole child in light of a growth mindset in a progressive educational system that promotes the role of education as a conduit for an effective citizenry coupled with the roles of motivation and creativity via the vehicle of fun as a catalyst. The understanding of the emotions and the impact of emotions in the academic and socio-emotional realm are pivotal in the interpretation of experience by humans and impact learning. These concepts are the underpinnings of the research and the proposal design. The end result of the study includes clarity about the impact fun can have on student learning culminating in an improvement of student achievement.

The methodologies of prior research used for this review utilized quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies. This literature review revealed a gap in the research community that can be broached with the study as well as open the door for future study of a quantitative nature in order to better understand the explicit role of fun in terms of learning and impacting student achievement. For the study, there is not a vehicle for data collection that facilitates quantitative analysis and therefore, a qualitative method is the most appropriate choice for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of the study was determining the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the role that fun plays in academic achievement and student learning. Prior research covered some aspects, but not the specifics explored within this study. The methodology utilized by this study was a case study with classroom observations, a focus group, and individual interviews. The study included processes for the collection of teacher perceptions related to the explicit inclusion of fun, as defined by this study, in instruction. Focus group conversations, individual interviews, and observations were used to gather information related to the effects on students academically and in the social/emotional realms when fun is used as an intentional instructional strategy.

Introduction

Professional educators with many years of effective instructional practice experience have experienced increasing levels of dissatisfaction with the emphasis on learning new educational processes deemed best practice by researchers. Districts buy programs to combat myriad issues encountered in schools only to find that there has to date been no magic formula to cure the ills of education. Instructors, administrators, parents, and students alike experience increasing negativity impacting our students and the research shows that it is not the program that matters, but rather the buy-in of those implementing the program (Barnum, 2018). Teacher time is a valuable commodity as it is limited, and faithful implementation of any program requires support and time to do the necessary work.

Teacher-targeted, extrinsic incentives work only in very specific situations because teachers simply do not have the time to learn the programs and implement them with fidelity (Springer et al., 2010). Therefore, teachers need to believe in the interventions they are using.

Strategies needs to be easily understood and relatively simple to implement. Moreover, it is vital to decrease teachers' workloads whenever possible or divert available time to plan for the inclusion of fun in instruction. Furthermore, there needs to be time provide for the interpretation of the results of their efforts. The Vanderbilt study on teacher incentives (Moran, 2010) demonstrated that teachers often do not have time to implement new programs. Thus, any new strategy, no matter how innocuous it may seem, will not be effectively implemented if there is insufficient time to do so.

The need for a simple, efficacious strategy for teachers to overcome student barriers is evident. Learning barriers are as varied as the number of students in any given classroom which then requires that any intervention be multifaceted in its effect (Oxford, 2015). This research study involved observing and investigating perceived effects of the inclusion of instructional fun that can be added to any lesson in any content. The study focused on teachers' perceptions were of the impact of fun on their own instruction, the students' learning experience, and any academic results that could be attributed to the activity after the implementation. As questions were broached, discussion emerged and then stimulated reflection. The study uncovered information that will guide future research and provide profession-specific information to help improve instruction overall in current and future educational practice.

The premise for this study evolved from the belief that when the direct instruction includes activities that students enjoy they will participate fully, overcoming barriers they may usually encounter. When students do not focus on their own self-perceptions or abilities due to the experience of having fun in the learning process, they essentially learn without realizing it. This premise guides the study as part of an attempt to understand perceptions of teachers as related to the application of fun in a more explicit and wide-spread manner. The outcomes

include information that supports the belief that the instructional inclusion of fun will create similar experiences across content and level for students regardless of the course or instructor.

The vast majority of prior research was conducted via mixed methods studies with a heavy dose of qualitative information due to the subjective nature of many of the components (Sunawan & Xiong, 2017; Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017; Machera & Machera, 2017; Yoo & Carter, 2017; Plester & Hutchison, 2016; Ripp, 2016). However, there were no studies found that directly correlated to the direction of the study. The primary areas of research that impacted the methodological process for the study were emotions and the affective domain, learning in general, and barriers to learning (Barrett, 2018; Yildizbas, 2017; Driscoll & Powell; 2016; Immordino-Yang, 2016).

All of these areas had extensive research in great detail of the aspects as stand-alone components, not as integrated mechanisms related to barriers to learning. There are many resources related to the role of direct instruction in the implementation of an "affective" curriculum, including EI along the lines of the work of Marzano et al. (2010) Lykke et al. (2015) Immordino-Yang (2016), and Driscoll and Powell (2016), all of which concluded with the importance of emotions and EI in individual probability of success in different areas of life.

As expected, the premise of much of the prior research related to emotions in the context of learning was that the more a person understands their own emotions and the role emotions play in their lives, the better they can manage or control the emotions and support positivity in their lives. This ability then translates to generalized happiness and satisfaction in life. The results of that research supported and reinforced the prior findings by researchers and academics such as Oxford (2015), Saarni (1999), Alpen (1973), and Dewey (1933). Emotional Intelligence levels that are high assist individuals in interpreting and relating to life experiences and allow

people to process and succeed more in learning and in life (Barrett, 2018; Kang, 2015; Zorba et al., 2016).

There was substantial correlated research related to emotions and the role of emotions on several contributing factors of the educational realm as well. Berridge et al. (2009), Yoo and Carter, (2017), Kalogiannakis and Touvlatzis (2015), Kagan (2008), and Barcelos (2015) were primary contributors to the content related to emotions impacting actions. All of these studies demonstrated the power emotions have in many areas of life for individuals. None of them proposed fun as a remedy.

However, the discussion often focused on the impact in terms of negative emotions hurting learning or positive emotions helping with different aspects of personality (Berridge, 2003). There were no studies found, nor results that explored positive emotions as ways to explicitly combat learning issues. Nor was there any evidence to suggest that prior researchers looked at those components in their results or overall summaries.

The perceptions of teachers about positive student emotions related to having fun and success in learning are addressed in the study due to the role of perception in terms of impetus for action (Begum & Khan, 2015; Yildizbas, 2017). The teachers in this study attempted to pre-empt negative responses to learning, instruction, and school in general by explicitly using fun as an instructional strategy, with the explicit intent to distract learners from the barriers and allow them to learn.

Research question. In order to learn more about the impact of the work done by the teachers, the following question was developed to delve into their experiences and thoughts and to focus the study on their perceptions: What are the perceptions of high school teachers

regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of fun as part of their instructional practice; as well as, the specific role of "fun" as a catalyst to triggering many of the positive aspects of the social-emotional tie to learning. Teachers in the district had volunteered to participate in an initiative in the building in an attempt to include activities that have been determined by consensus of the instructional staff and administration to be fun. The teachers then discussed their perceptions related to the impact of these new, fun strategies with lessons that they had taught in the past and had trouble getting students to participate, enjoy, and/or have success in learning the content. Because the use of fun in instruction began prior to the initiation of this study, the best way to assess the perceptions of the teachers was through a case study that examined the phenomenon in the actual setting and context.

Perceptions are subjective and rely on memories of personal experience. The data related to perceptions are qualitative by nature and is not conducive to quantitative measurement. Rather, it is important to understand the subjective situation through the human lens of perception. This case study is a descriptive, single case study designed to explore the perceptions of high school teachers as to the perceived causality of the explicit inclusion of fun in instruction (Yin, 2003). The study includes information gathered from observations, a focus group, and individual interviews. According to Burgess (2012) there must be an emotional component in order to engage students. Fun was the emotion in question for the participants, and thus became the focus of this study.

The structure of the study supported dialogue with teachers about the issues of disengagement. Disengagement must be conquered to effectively encourage students to enthusiastically reengage in the academic process (Burgess, 2012). The problems at the base of this study were that was it unclear how the perceptions of teachers related to the role of fun impact their instruction, and secondly, the academic impact of the explicit inclusion of fun in instruction was heretofore unknown. Participant interviews, a focus group conversation, and classroom observations provided ample opportunity to observe and discuss the inclusion of fun as a process and the subsequent perceptions of the participants.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The setting for the study is located in a part of the state that has a low socioeconomic median, high levels of domestic issues and drug abuse in families. During the study, the school had approximately 1,325 students in attendance; an even proportion of females and males. The majority of students in terms of ethnicity are fairly homogenous with 80% of the population self-identifying as white. Minority representation is as follows: 10.5% Hispanic, 89.5% Not Hispanic; regard race the population is: 80% White, 0.5% African American, 1.5% Asian, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 2.% American Indian, and 5% Multi-racial. The population of participants for the study was 57 general education teachers: 36 male, 21 female; 51 Caucasian, four Hispanic, two Asian. The 12 volunteers included: eight male, four female; 11 Caucasian, one Hispanic.

Students in the entire state must also meet state Essential Skills standards in reading, writing, and math to graduate. Per district guidelines, there are 24 credits required for graduation. Along with credit and essential skills, students must pass the Career-Related Learning Standards and meet 40 hours of community service. Approximately 35% of graduates attend a 2-year community college, while another 20% register to attend a 4-year college and/or

university. On average every year, 3% register to attend a trade schools and 3% enlisted in the military. Along with the general education classes the school offers special education classes, modified classes, multiple College Now classes, 14 different Advanced Placement courses and an extensive career and technical, vocational program.

The purposive sampling was utilized to obtain a desired sample of perceptions from teachers. The study included six participants in a focus group, six individual interviews, and six classroom observations (three from the interview participants, three from the focus group). The participants were high school teachers from diverse subjects and grade levels who volunteered to participate in the study after all teachers were invited. The school in question has a history of lower graduation rates and higher levels of truancy and drop outs than the majority of schools of similar size, diversity, socioeconomic circumstance, and geographical situation. Teachers in the school were previously invited to explore the role of the explicit inclusion of fun in their instruction by administration to observe the effects on students' social/emotional health, attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. All teachers were invited to participate. Only teachers who had been implementing fun responded to the invitation.

Those who responded represented a broad range of subjects and included all levels of students. The participants were then invited to participate in either the focus group or the individual interviews. The participants indicated if they had a preference or not. Once preferences were indicated, the other participants were placed in each group in a way to balance core and elective teachers and grade levels represented in the student population. Participants also indicated willingness or preferences related to being observed. The three participants from each group selected for observations were based on participant preferences and the intent to observe different subjects and grade levels.

Instrumentation

This study includes information gathered from observations, focus group discussions, and individual interviews with participants. Observations were made in classrooms during instructional times when fun was intentionally used as an instructional strategy by the participants. Observation notes were recorded, and data collected via notes taken. Tallies were taken on the observation checklist found in Appendix C. Once the activity was in progress, after all logistics and explanations were clear, tallies were taken in terms of observable positive and negative behaviors in the areas of: overarching climate (interactions); teacher behaviors (management, instruction); and, student behaviors (attitude, participation). The tallies were taken for ten minutes and timed with an alarm to ensure that all observations had the same process. Ten minutes was enough time to gather data, but short enough to ensure that there would not be a loss of focus on the tallies due to other distractions. The remaining 20 to 30 minutes were then observed and documented via note taking which was later coded for analysis.

Individual interview data collection included answers from structured individual interview questions found in Appendix D as well as any follow up questions. The instrumentation of the focus group was the structured questions found in Appendix E as well as any follow up questions. For both groups, the questions asked for participant perceptions related to: student academic success; social/emotional impacts; frustrations and barriers for teachers; classroom climate; instructional needs; and the inclusion of fun. Participants were also asked to reflect on changes in behavior or achievement from traditionally at-risk students when fun was used as an intentional instructional strategy.

Credibility and dependability of the responses was supported by on the objectivity of "evidence" from observations (e.g. 20 out of 30 students were working on the activity in groups.

10 were doing other activities) rather than "subjective" generalizations or feelings (e.g. the kids liked the lesson). Focus group and interview validity and reliability were dependent upon the accuracy of the memories and the perceptions of the participants. The presentation of those perceptions supported by the observations are valid and reliable information that is relevant to the study.

Data Collection

Twelve teachers from varied content areas participated in the research study at the school site. All of the teachers had been implementing intentionally fun instructional strategies over the course of the school year. All 12 teachers were informed of the study and given assurances related to the confidentiality of the interviews, observations, and focus group discussion. Notes were taken during individual interviews, the focus group conversation, and classroom observations.

Six of the teachers participated in structured face-to-face interviews for 30 minutes each using a set of questions designed to elicit individual, personal perceptions based on anecdotal or other evidence from each participant (see Appendix D). The other six teachers were brought together as a focus group to discuss reflections and perceptions (see Appendix E). I asked follow-up questions during the individual interviews but did not participate in the conversation of the focus group in order to not influence the flow of information coming from the participants. I avoided any questions that could be considered "leading" toward any assumptions or conclusions. I asked clarifying questions and checked with the participants to ensure general notes reflected the intent of the participants accurately.

Observations were conducted in six classes, three from teachers in the focus group and three from teachers from the individual interviews. I used an observation checklist (see

Appendix C) and took notes during the observation. Data were transferred to identical templates to maintain a formal structure and pattern of information. I did not divulge to the teachers the items that would be observed prior to nor during the observations. This allowed the class to proceed as the teacher intended, and not influenced by the checklist. The teachers who were observed were asked to let their classes know that the class would be observed, but that the observer would not be interacting with the class. I did not interact with any of the participants, nor their students during the observations.

After the interviews and observations, I met with participants individually and shared the information garnered from the observations, focus group conversation, and individual interviews. During the debrief, I asked the participants to offer any new thoughts or clarifications they may have developed in the time between the interactions with me and the debrief, or as a result of any information provided to them by me. Any new information was transcribed, coded, and added to the information for analysis.

Identification of Attributes

Attributes reviewed in the study included teacher perceptions and observation of intrinsic student motivation, academic engagement of students, and teacher perceptions related to the impact of fun on student achievement. Since this is a study on teacher perceptions, the data collected were primarily anecdotal. However, it was possible to observe the attributes such as motivation and engagement through student words and actions. These observations, coupled with work, assessments, or other artifacts created by the teacher provided ample evidence of individual and group motivation in the classroom. For the purposes of this study the characterization of attributes was as follows:

- Achievement was characterized by depth of reflection via assessment or in conversations and group activities that demonstrates or reflects growth from one standard on a continuum of learning toward another based on evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Marzano et al., 2010). In this study, the impact on student achievement was characterized by teacher perceptions of student learning and/or anecdotal evidence or assessment results and other evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Lemov et al., 2016).
- Engagement was characterized by observed behaviors when the students were working directly/interacting with standards-based content information for the purpose of learning the material for future assessment.
- Impediments were characterized as behaviors and or experiences that could be observed that demonstrate a rationale for a negative behavior associated with the learning.
- Instruction was characterized by any intentional strategy or interaction utilized by the teacher to impart standards-based, content information to the students.
- Motivation was characterized by individual investment in the learning process in terms of explicit participation (individual and group) as well as task completion and other evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016).

All information gathered was aligned to one or more attributes in order to provide meaningful information to support final conclusions related to the study. This assisted in the creation of recommendations for further study, and indicated areas for quantitative study as

needed to support the qualitative findings. Each of these attributes was reviewed independently as well as examined for any supportable or anecdotal correlations.

Data Analysis Procedures

Prior research in this area did not cover the same content, however, the methodological analysis procedures related to identifying and coding the anecdotal perceptions of the participants were a primary process for this study. Interviews, focus group discussions, and observations notes were transcribed and coded in terms of any words or themes related to the attributes for study. Interview responses focus group conversation responses, and observer notes, were coded to clearly reflect participant perceptions. The work of Saldaña (2016) guided the coding process. All codes were one-word expressions of the phrase or sentence or observational note. Analysis included identifying commonalities and differences in responses and differentiating group experiences from individual perceptions. Similar concepts were grouped and given a code that maintained the integrity of the original perceptions.

The process began with 764 individual comments or observed behaviors. Initially concepts with identical words were grouped, for example, “academic” and “academics” were placed in the same group. Exact or obvious matches first produced 530 codes. The next step was to group concepts by intent of meaning, for example, “kids had fun” and “it was a lot of fun” were placed in the same group. The generalization groups narrowed the number to 253 codes. After that, nuances and subtleties were considered, and the list was processed multiple times until there were 60 codes that accurately reflected the concepts presented by participants or observed in the classrooms. The analysis of the coding determined the themes that emerged from the study. Identification of themes was essential to the analysis of the information needed to answer the research question. The study provided the anecdotal or observable backdrop of

information that supported the conclusions that were drawn which determined the impact of the inclusion of fun on the students and their learning as perceived by the teachers.

Perceptions related to student achievement were based on numerical evidence for some participants, but specific, quantitative, student data were not utilized nor any results in assessment reviewed by me. Only information that was shared by the teachers of their own volition and ability to do so while maintaining student confidentiality was considered during the study. The study methods did not include the examination or analysis of student work at the individual, class or school level in order to focus on the teacher perceptions of the phenomenon.

Limitations of the Research Design

The study included interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. This study did not include a statistical analysis of student grades, scores or abilities. The study was conducted in a small town with only one high school. The participants did not exactly reflect the make-up of the constituency of the entire faculty, which may skew the representation of the larger population and therefore may restrict or impede extrapolation to a greater population due to the small sample size in a small geographic location. This limited the amount of information available.

The variety of content areas and ages allowed for some generalizations, but not for conclusive determination. Since teachers were voluntarily participating, the results were limited by their willingness, time, and ability to complete the tasks. There was no control group, so there is no way to correlate or determine conclusive cause and effect. The study was not about numerical data or other quantifiable input, but rather, about perceptions of teachers "to establish a framework for discussion and debate" (Yin, 2009, p. 2). Individual perceptions can only be on

a scope that each individual can elaborate or reflect upon the experience and the information they encounter during the process, which created additional limitations in the findings.

Validation

In terms of the validity of this study and the results that are shared, individual honesty in the process must be assumed. The belief that participants have "best intent" in the process and are seeking only to learn if there is a positive effect on student learning and/or academic success when fun is explicitly included in instruction. The study of perceptions of the teachers rather than the academic scores of the students limited the analysis to qualitative methods, but still provided information related to what should next be studied to enhance academic research in the areas studied.

The study includes teacher perceptions of changes from prior instructional experiences. Teachers were asked to specifically add fun to lessons that they have taught in the past that were unpleasant, difficult, or boring to see any differences in personal and or student experience of the lessons. In order for the study to be valid, perceptions needed to be as objective as possible, therefore it was incumbent on me to examine the information provided by participants and explore information that could be considered subjective and ask the teachers what "evidence" they would cite as a rationale or reason for the perceptions they have. For example, if a teacher stated that "the students loved the activity," I asked for information or evidence as to what the teacher observed that led them to draw that conclusion. Did they have physical information (surveys, scores, grades), anecdotal evidence such as student statements, or physical demeanor and behavior? Through the exploration of subjective statements, it was important to limit unsupported information and therefore provide a substantive case for the validity of the research.

Credibility. In order to create the best situation for a credible and meaningful study, individual interviews were confidential and reported without identifiers so that teachers felt free to express any information they determined pertinent to the study. Focus group conversations began explicitly with a disclaimer that all information in terms of who has shared any particular information will be kept confidential to the group and reported out without identifiers or in aggregate format as generalizations or percentages of the group of participants. All participants were informed that all comments and information would be noted with an anonymous identifier.

Teachers in this study were instructed in the implementation of fun as an instructional strategy, and all had been implementing fun prior to the study. All classes involved, as general-education classes, included students of all levels of ability, behavior, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The teachers agreed to report accurately and honestly their experiences and perceptions. The definition of fun for the purpose of this study was shared, and therefore there was a common understanding of the concept as it relates to instruction and learning in general. Teachers were encouraged to reflect and expand upon their observations, as well as paying attention to any preconceived notions or beliefs. The analysis of the study took into consideration any biases or other impediments to validity or credibility during the interviews.

Participants were asked to give evidence to support the perceptions they have developed. Descriptors that were subjective were followed up with questions to gather evidence for the perception or belief. In the focus group, questions delved into teacher perceptions about any other reasons for the results (or lack of results as the case may be) they found in the experience that could be attributed to things other than the inclusion of fun explicitly in the lesson. There were follow up debriefs with all teachers who were part of observations, and with individual

interview participants as necessary in order to supply enough information to assure maximum credibility of the findings and results.

The participants were not informed about research conducted by prior studies, nor the expected findings of the study in order to minimize any bias or alterations in teacher behaviors. The intent was to find out what actually happens, not influence behaviors based on personal beliefs. Credibility of the study was contingent upon the information that each participant garnered on their own, without any impetus or catalyst that might change behaviors or how they interpret or perceive what they experience and observe as they were given open-ended questions to prompt individual thought and reflection.

Dependability. In order to create the best situation for a dependable study, the teachers used the strategies over multiple weeks of school with subjects and lessons they have taught before. The focus group and individual interviews prompted reflective thought and exposed personal perceptions via questions that were reviewed by professionals in order to ensure minimal inclusion of subjective components from the process or me. The study focused on the perception data provided by the teachers as well as some observational data from field notes while observing the classes.

Expected Findings

Based on the work of Pink (2013) and Washor and Mojkowski (2014) related to learning and motivation, there was reason to believe that this study would discover that teachers find academic, personal, and anecdotal evidence to support the theory that when students have fun (as created by explicit inclusion of strategies) during a lesson they will be motivated intrinsically to participate in the lesson and will learn the information better and at a deeper level. Another theoretical result was that the emotional and social barriers that can cause self-image issues may

be counter-acted as the students focus on having fun and not on the barriers. Additionally, the students who suffer from a lack of belief in personal ability due to disability or gaps in learning might find success after an activity that allowed them to demonstrate learning without a negative experience may help students overcome a false belief that they are incapable of learning concepts.

The expectation in the study was that the findings would support future qualitative studies to determine actual statistics related to academic growth, student retention of information, students remaining in school, and graduation rates. Any statistically significant correlations could significantly impact instructional strategies and teacher professional development and training methods. Support for these findings demonstrates that having fun helps students learn regardless of individual student background, ability, information gaps, or prior levels of intrinsic motivation, it is important to do further research to see if there is a better, more efficacious way to teach than simply adding fun.

Ethical Issues

The school Principal and district Superintendent gave permission for the study. The participants were informed of the intent, purpose, timeline, and scope of the study. All participants voluntarily chose to support the research. There were no negative repercussions for choosing to leave the study. No participants chose to leave the study and all parameters proposed for the methodology and integrity of the study were maintained. Confidentiality was explicitly defined and explained to all participants and maintained throughout the study. There were no external pressures to participate from the employer or other faculty associations, organizations or groups. There were no monetary or tangible rewards or incentives involved in the study other than a coffee gift card for the interview participants, and lunch provided for the

focus group. All participants were free to ask questions and make their own determinations as to their individual involvement.

All recordings were auditory with no visual images of the participants. All transcripts identify the participants with number when appropriate and all items that may indicate who someone is were made generic to ensure that no participant could be individually identified. All recordings and documents were secured in a locked cabinet in a private office. None of the participants were related professionally to me. There were no subordinates or members from my regular work experience in the study. There is no deceptive practice involved in the study. All participants were informed that any publications or reports would not reflect identifiable information or material that could be linked to them as individuals.

Conflict of interest assessment. The purpose of the study did not and does not conflict with any existing building or district policies. The study was not designed to influence or change policy or procedures of the environment, but rather to inform me about the perceptions of teachers already involved in an instructional activity. I did not receive any monetary or tangible compensation nor rewards for any of the work related to the study, nor for anything related to the implementation, the implications, or the results of the study.

Researcher's position. I was an administrator for multiple programs related to alternative educational supports, GED support, community college connections, summer school, and online education. The teachers in the study were regular education teachers in different subjects who worked with departments and faculty in areas that I did not have any previous professional connections to. As an advocate for alternative educational opportunities for students who would be considered at-risk, I was interested in discovering activities, actions, programs, or other things that will help students overcome barriers. This study is a logical extension of the

work of the regular education teachers who are including fun in their instruction to determine if pursuing a quantitative study to follow up on the results of this study is warranted.

Ethical issues in the study. The intent of this study was to determine the possible benefits for all learners when fun is included as an explicit component of instruction. None of the teachers were my subordinates nor departmental colleagues. All information gathered was related to the perceptions of teachers who had been including fun in their instruction to identify if there were evidence that would warrant further study. No one received any reward or compensation for participating in the study other than a coffee gift card or provided lunch. All participants were voluntary and chose to participate in both the activities related to including fun in instruction and participating in the focus group, observations, or individual interviews. There were no external motivators or impetus for participation, only informal, professional desires to share their perceptions.

Summary

Prior observation and experience in teaching led to theories about the explicit inclusion of fun as a catalyst for students to overcome academic, social, emotional, and other barriers to learning. Through investigation of prior research, there was evidence for the impact of emotions on learning, but no specific studies that examined the specific and explicit use of fun as an instructional strategy. The study was designed to embrace a conceptual framework based on the progressive perspective of Dewey as an underpinning to look at the inclusion of fun as a possible way to move the "whole child" forward in their learning as they experience fun during instruction. The results of the study help determine the role of fun as a mitigating factor for barriers to learning and guides the direction of future research.

The study was a qualitative case study that included a focus group, individual interviews and classroom observations. The participants were teachers in a high school in multiple subjects covering students in all grades 9 through 12 who had been intentionally including fun in instruction at the invitation of administration to participate voluntarily in an instructional initiative. The study examined teacher perceptions related to their explicit inclusion of fun indirect instruction. Student data were not used other than as reported anecdotally by participants. The limitations, validity, credibility, and dependability of the study centered on the limitations of the individual participants and the scope of their observations, perceptions and conclusions. Analysis of the information includes follow-up questions and information to provide the most objective conclusions and results.

The research lead to the indication that the inclusion of fun would have a direct correlation to individual enjoyment and participation in the learning activity, and therefore, they would learn more and at a deeper level. There were no ethical or moral implications related to me, the research, the participants, nor the results or their dissemination. The study was new to the research community and provides support for future research of a quantitative nature to develop more specific correlations to determine statistical significance that would support changes in instructional, best practice on a larger scale for educators in the future.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The findings from this study were produced from the qualitative analysis of transcripts from six individual one-to-one interviews, a focus group of six participants, and six classroom observations. No participants are identified by name, nor are there any other identifiers other than the subjects taught by the participants, which are all core courses taught by multiple teachers in order to ensure confidentiality. Findings are presented in relation to the research question and the themes that emerged during data analysis of the components of the study. The observations were made during the week of May 13, 2019. The interviews and focus group conversation occurred during the week of May 20, 2019.

Introduction

Traditional educational theories and periodic attempts by professional educators, educational philanthropists and governmental leaders have produced hundreds of programs, interventions, trainings, and experiments trying to improve educational practice and increase levels of academic ability in our students. The sheer number of possible options for a teacher, school, district, state, or nation is staggering and it becomes increasingly difficult to determine which practices and programs will indeed make a difference. The research shows that the buy-in of those implementing the instruction is the crux of the success or failure of any program or intervention (Barnum, 2018). Teachers need easy-to-implement strategies that can support any content. Learning barriers are as varied as the number of students in any given classroom which then requires that any intervention be multi-faceted in its effect (Oxford, 2015). This study involved observing and investigating perceived effects of the inclusion of fun to any instructional lesson in any content. The premise for this study is that when the direct instruction includes activities that students enjoy they will participate fully, and therefore overcome traditional issues

(e.g. emotional or academic) or, potentially, prior, self-inflicted personal perceptions about personal ability or worth to learning that may not have basis in fact.

The perceptions of teachers about positive student emotions related to having fun and success in learning are addressed in the study in terms of impetus for action as perceived by the teachers themselves (Begum & Khan, 2015; Yildizbas, 2017). The teachers in the study had been invited earlier in the school year by administration to participate in an initiative to intentionally include fun in their direct instruction to see if there were academic and/or social or emotional benefits for students. The teachers were asked to pay attention and take note of the results of the activities and make observations about the role of fun in pre-empting negative responses to learning, instruction, and school in general. The participants were presented with a series of things to look for, including: fun as a distraction from self-perceived barriers; fun as a catalyst for participation by reluctant learners; fun as a catalyst to stronger memory and retention of the content taught; and fun as a mechanism for learning how to participate and interact with others for better social/emotional connections.

Description of the Sample

The participants included 12 teachers that were purposively sampled at a semirural high school in the Pacific Northwest area of the United States. There were approximately 1,325 students in the building. The participants' subject areas were distributed as follows: three math teachers (Algebra a, Algebra Ib, Geometry), two language arts teachers (Grade 9 LA, AP Literature), three science teachers (Physical Science, Environmental Science, AP Biology); one English Language Learners teacher; and one Spanish teacher. During the semester of the study, each teacher carried a load of six classes with from 175 to 225 students daily, and all of them indicated that they implemented the activities in their classes. There were 853 distinct students

in the classes that were instructed by the participants in the study. Some students had classes with more than one of the teachers in the study. No students were interviewed nor was any student data collected. The teachers' insights and comments related to the impact of their instruction upon students in academic or social/emotional ways were not solicited in any way during the study. The information in this study related to student achievement and growth in any way was shared spontaneously and voluntarily as anecdotal evidence by participants as part of their responses to the question prompts found in Appendices C and D to support their own personal opinions.

All instructional faculty members in the building who had been incorporating fun intentionally in direct instruction were invited to participate in the study via an announcement during a faculty meeting and a follow-up flyer in their mailboxes in the office that explained the intent of the case study and the basic information related to the timeline and process. There were 12 who responded and were able to participate in the study. Six of those teachers were invited to participate in individual interviews. The teachers involved in the interviews taught the following subjects: Algebra A (the first part of a three-part Algebra series for students who need basic-functions preparation or pre-algebra strategies before being academically ready for Algebra B and C); AP Biology; AP Literature, ELL (English Language Learners); Environmental Science; and Geography (a ninth-grade class). The other six teachers were invited to participate in the focus group. The teachers involved in the focus group taught the following subjects: 9th-Grade Language Arts; Algebra 1; Geometry; Physical Science; Spanish 2; and World History. Three teachers from each group volunteered to be observed. The three observations from the interview group were completed in this order; Geography, AP Biology, and Environmental Science. The

three observations from the focus group were completed in this order; 9th-Grade Language Arts, Geometry, and Spanish 2.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The research question**, "**What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?" guided the process for the study. The data in the study included teacher perceptions and observations of student motivation, academic engagement of students, and the overall impact of fun on student achievement and social-emotional experience. Since this is a study on teacher perceptions, the data collected during interviews and the focus group was primarily anecdotal; however, the participants provided ample statistical and numerical information based on the data they had about the achievement of their students, which they mentioned in their responses. Upon coding of the comments and observational evidence collected in the classrooms, it was possible to identify themes such as motivation and engagement through teacher statements about their perceptions as well as student words and actions. These observations, coupled with work, assessments, or other artifacts created by the teacher provided ample evidence of individual and group achievement, engagement and motivation in the classroom.

The classes in the school are approximately 50 minutes in length and all classroom observations were all between 30 to 40 minutes in length, beginning after attendance was taken and ending when the activities were completed. The observation templates found in Appendix C were used to identify the setting, teacher behaviors, learning targets (if present), instructional set-up, and student behaviors. The observation and over-all descriptors of behavior, words, demeanor, and attitude were narrated as objectively as possible. During the lessons, once

students were actively participating in the lesson, a simple tally of behaviors was taken in positive and negative areas during a 10-minute segment of the observation. The positive behaviors tallied were: related to themselves, related to other students, related to the teacher or the class, related to the content or the lesson, laughing and/or smiling, on-topic questions; appropriate humor, helping other students (providing answers/helpful interactions), and "light bulb" moments. "Light bulb" moments are characterized as an observable student behavior when he or she demonstrates or verbalizes new learning or understanding suddenly. The negative behaviors tallied were: related to themselves; related to other students; related to the teacher or the class; related to the content or the lesson; rude or inappropriate interactions; off-topic disruptions; inappropriate humor; students distracting other students; any belligerence, refusal to participate or follow directions; and obvious failure to complete the lesson or objective. All documents were transcribed by individual concept observed. All transcripts and notes were coded for analysis.

The focus group met in a local restaurant and lunch was purchased for the group. The discussion occurred in a private section of the restaurant. The responses to the 15 questions from Appendix E were transcribed for coding. Each question was asked of the group and participants could ask questions of each other as well as expound upon a concept in a conversational style. When a thought or concept was introduced, participants would often ask how many people agreed with the statements, thoughts, or feelings. In every instance, the teachers felt that the observations made by other teachers was also true in their own experiences. All documents were transcripted by individual concept observed. All transcripts and notes were coded for analysis.

Each individual interview was one-on-one in a private setting. The 15 questions from Appendix D were used, answers recorded, and then transcripted for coding. Participants were

able to return to prior questions to clarify or add additional information. Minimal questions for clarification were needed to ensure the responses accurately reflected the intent of the participants. Participants were given a gift card for a local coffee shop after the interview; there were no other compensations or rewards. The transcripts of the interviews and the focus group discussion were placed into a spreadsheet format by question in the order asked, one question per sheet. All documents were transcripted by individual concept observed. All transcripts and notes were coded for analysis.

Coding. Coding was utilized to conduct a thematic analysis of the transcribed materials. Since this method is not technically a methodology, it is a flexible and malleable way to identify and interpret themes in the work (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Using this method requires ensuring that the true theme of each piece of data is accurately reflected. The vocabulary used by the participants must not interfere with the true meaning they are trying to convey. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explain that the density of information is troublesome to interpret and requires time to make sense of the information. Coding the themes that are exposed allows for "indexing or mapping data" in an efficacious manner (Elliott, 2018, p. 2851). Semantics need to be secondary to intent or true meaning, and then must be connected purposefully to the research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The coding process of this study began with the interview and focus group transcripts being separated into phrases or sentences of one theme and then each comment placed in a cell on a spreadsheet. For example, the teacher response, "When did they quit? When did they start/stop learning?" was separated into three different themes. "When did they quit?" was written in one cell; "When did they start learning?" was placed in another, separate cell; and "When did they stop learning?" in a third. Once every unique idea had its own cell, a key word

or phrase was placed next to it so that codes could emerge from the themes presented. Those themes eventually became the list of codes found in Appendix B. Repetitive concepts were given the same words or phrases.

Coding was used to determine themes expressed by participants from the raw comments as stated, not summarized. The themes became the coding identifiers for similar comments and notes. All evidentiary sentences, statements or notes were coded. As additional transcripts were added the common codes were compared to keep an overall account of themes across the study. For example; "assessment" was the code placed by a remark from the first participant in the interviews related to her comment about testing being used as a determinant for student success. All following comments made related to assessment in that context were then given that same code. This then allowed counting of the instances that a concept was reflected over the study across all aspects of the study, as well as determining what concepts only occurred in any given setting or by only one or two participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Once all of the cells had a corresponding key word or phrase, the spreadsheet was filtered by the initial codes in alphabetical order. Similar phrases were evaluated to see if they could be placed under the same "code." After the first sort, there were 122 different codes. Each code was then analyzed to see if it could be altered to be more inclusive of other comments. The process narrowed the list to 58 codes. Each code was then assigned an associated theme, achievement, engagement, impediment, instruction, or motivation. The codes were filtered once again into subcodes with descriptors to further assist with general inclusion of themes. Engagement is one of the themes reviewed and in this study always refers to the involvement of the students with the curriculum. The theme of "Engagement" has 30 codes; however, it is divided up by the subcodes, "engagement," "positive response," and "relationships." Under the

subcode of engagement are the following descriptors: at-risk/struggling kids participate, collaboration, general increase, kinesthetic, paying attention, producing work, and verbal. During the coding there was also a differentiation between teaching behaviors and student behaviors. For example, a teacher using humor while teaching would be coded "Instruction: Humor" and was given the theme of "Motivation." However, students being humorous while relating to the activity was labeled, "Positive Response: Humor from students" and given the theme of "Engagement" (Strauss, 2010).

Observations were recorded in three different ways; the document templates can be found in Appendix C. There was an observation checklist that provided information about the topic, basic student demographic information, and the date of the observation as well as other information to set the stage for understanding the data. The second part is a transcript of the observation itself that reflects: the stated learning targets, if any; the physical classroom set-up and environment; the set-up for the lesson or activity, any instructional observations, the themes, and accoutrements of the activity or lesson, if any; any instructions given by the teacher; and any additional observations. The observations were different from the interviews and focus group because there were no questions asked of the participants and therefore all coding was based on the observed behaviors. All observations were broken down into individual concepts and given codes from the created list. Careful attention was paid to see if new codes emerged from the observations that had not emerged in the interviews or focus group. There were two new codes identified solely from the observations: a "danger" of potentially offending someone was identified after observation of a student being offended at the discussion in the activity; and the "positive response" of students feeling safe and included came from an overheard comment by a student's statement that they felt like it was a safe environment for everyone.

The individual interviews produced limited elaboration on questions. Each question was asked, and the participant would respond succinctly. The focus group, on the other hand, would elicit additional thoughts because as one idea was presented as an answer it would trigger other ideas along the same vein from others in the group, thus there were more details provided for each answer. The observations were dependent upon close attention to detail of what occurred. The audio taping of each observation allowed for more thorough transcript accuracy. All information gathered was aligned with one or more themes in order to provide meaningful information to support final conclusions related to the study. This assisted in the creation of recommendations for further study and indicated areas for quantitative study as needed to support the qualitative findings. Each of these themes was reviewed independently as well as examined for any supportable or anecdotal correlations. Once all comments and observations were labeled with an appropriate code and theme, the data were ready for analysis. The codes were alphabetized and numbered from one to 60 and can be found in Appendix B. The 764 individual comments or observations were separated into the 60 codes and the corresponding five themes.

Summary of the Findings

In answer to the research question, **"**What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?" the data supported the expected results posited. With more than 850 students in a student body of approximately 1,325 students represented in the instruction provided by the participants, and 20% of the teaching staff participating, there was ample information provided, both by participants in their responses to the questions and in observation of students in the classroom.

The themes that emerged provide a clear picture as to the impact of fun in direct instruction in terms of academic achievement and in the social-emotional realm for students.

Instruction designed with the explicit inclusion of fun was described by all participants as including the following elements: alignment to standards, creativity, enthusiasm, choices for students, and humor. Participants added that it was important to ensure that the fun activities in the direct instruction included at least one of the following: collaboration, hands-on portion, and/or kinesthetic activity. The final component of a lesson needed to be a way to prove the learning via a verbal, written, or other demonstrable manner. All participants mentioned the following needs: a specific purpose for the fun as aligned to standards, ensuring that lessons are at the appropriate level, time to collaborate with peers, time to plan for the inclusion of fun in their lessons, and ensuring that classroom management is preventative of opportunities for students to get carried away, or for the fun to get out of hand or off-track from the purpose.

Academic achievement. The perception of all the participants was that the explicit, intentional inclusion of fun in direct instruction positively impacted student achievement. Participants reported increases in the following areas: motivation, work completion, engagement in the subject area, test scores, course grades, and overall academic growth. Participants reported increases in intentional and unintentional learning as well as the perception that learning became easier for students. Students were described as more willing to engage, take risks, and work through the tedious chores when fun is included in the lesson. Participants added that instruction became easier as the number of negative experiences with students were decreased significantly or eliminated entirely. According to participants, positive responses to instruction with the intentional inclusion of fun included increases in: confidence, curiosity, classroom energy and excitement, humor from students, resiliency, surprise, and trust. Participants also noted students

seeking and accepting higher levels of rigor in the content. Students and teachers experienced more reciprocity in learning and found more relevance as new connections were made by all stakeholders in the activities.

In terms of numerical or statistical information, participants all noted an increase in class averages ranging from 5 to 22%. Participants reported decreases in the number of failing students and underachieving students. There were two participants who shared that the state test scores reflected a significant decrease in students with the lowest score rating and five participants stated that there was an increase in the number of students meeting and exceeding the standards. Across the board, the participants provided information and/or anecdotal evidence of positive the impact on academic achievement as a result of the inclusion of fun in instruction.

Social-emotional realm. The perception of all the participants was that the explicit, intentional inclusion of fun in direct instruction positively impacted students in the social-emotional realm. Participants reported increases in the following areas: attendance; collaboration; inclusive classroom climate and community; participation of struggling students; participation of students with difficulties; participation of at-risk students; participation of reluctant students; and, interpersonal interactions outside of customary peer groups. The concepts of Emotional Intelligence, Culturally Competent lessons, and Trauma-Informed classrooms were all mentioned by at least two participants as areas that were positively impacted by the inclusion of fun in their lessons.

Participants all commented on a general climate of positivity in their classrooms much of the time since they have included fun in lessons throughout the year. Participants noted a decrease in cliques and other exclusive groups of students in the classrooms. There was an increase in students coming in outside of class time to hang out in the classrooms of the

participants to interact with other students and the teachers. Students taking the lead in learning and being more inclusive of students from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and/or social situation were all noted by multiple participants. Participants also observed a cyclical "habit of success" in that students who had struggled before increased participation when there was fun included and would feel successful, participating progressively more as the class continued. Decreases were noted in the following areas: anxiety; apathy or disengagement; refusal to participate or do work; negative interactions between students; negative actions with adults; and/or, personal life impeding learning.

Presentation of the Data and Results

After coding, there were 764 different data points (comments and/or observations) scaffolded under 60 different codes; 45% of the data came from the focus group conversation, 31% from the individual interviews and 24% from the observations. Themes emerged from the data and each code was sorted into a theme. The data is presented here in the following manner: each theme with associated codes are listed in alphabetical order by theme; within each theme the codes are presented in numerical order and separated by group. After the themes, the observations are presented with the associated codes and themes present in each observation. Consecutively after the observations, the data is reviewed in terms of the research question, and then, the overall presentation of the data ends with a cohesive summary of all data in the summary of findings.

Research question. To ensure that the data is pertinent and informative, it is important to revisit the research question and present the information within that context**:** What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to

be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?

Themes. Each idea presented by participants was analyzed to determine the nature of the information. Positive versus negative was a primary concern. If two participants gave the same response, for example "assessment," but one used it in a positive way, such as showing growth, and the other used it as an area that concerned students, the ideas would be reflected in two different codes based on the intent or explanation of the concept. In the same way that codes were combined and transformed to be inclusive of the phrases or ideas they represented, the themes that began to emerge were given initial labels and then an analysis of the labels allowed for streamlining and developing the five cohesive themes that surfaced and are represented here. Due diligence was utilized to ensure that all codes were accurately labeled and placed in the appropriate theme for further analysis of the data. The themes are as follows: Achievement, Engagement, Impediments, Instruction, and Motivation.

Achievement. Achievement is composed of 12% of the data collected. Achievement in this study is characterized by depth of reflection via assessment or in conversations and group activities that demonstrate or reflect growth from one standard on a continuum of learning toward another based on evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Marzano et al., 2010). The impact on student achievement was characterized by teacher perceptions of student learning and/or anecdotal evidence or assessment results and other evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Lemov et al., 2016). There are four codes associated with achievement: Assessment (including Objectives and Goals), Learning: Increased, Easier, and Learning: Unintentional. Assessment

was invoked as a positive when discussing it as evidence of growth; and as a negative in terms of the pressure put upon students and teachers.

There were 89 distinct observations and/or comments that were contributing factors to the study related to achievement. Three of the data points were found in observations, 26 were expressed in individual interviews and sixty came out during the focus group conversation. Under the code "assessment (including objectives and goals)" 26 data points were developed and covered anything that was pertinent to the objective of a lesson or the manner in which the knowledge will be assessed, or the results of assessment. All participants indicated that it is vital to ensure that all activities and instruction be aligned to standards and eventually assessed. There were further statements that demonstrated that the lessons that included fun were specifically designed to have the students interact with standards-based curriculum in a fun manner. All participants in at least one part of the interviews or focus group conversation affirmed that having something "just for fun" can actually work against productive learning because students will skim through actual work to get to the "fun" activity. Participants indicated that when the content information was fun to see, the learning became the objective and assessment scores increased. There were 48 mentions of perceptions (often backed by assessment data, according to participants) that student achievement increased.

There were 15 data points due to teacher perceptions as stated in the interviews or focus group that indicated that students "learned more easily" when fun was incorporated. One participant mentioned "More kids pass sections that used to cause a lot of issues and struggles," and another said, "They memorize and remember more." This combines well with the observations that teachers saw surrounding "unintentional learning" which occurred when

students did not realize they were learning content until the lesson was well underway. Teachers observed that sometimes it was fun as an instructor to "trick students into learning."

Overall, there was 100% agreement among participants that students learned more easily and were then able to demonstrate the retention of the learning via formative and summative assessments. An additional component in the achievement realm that overlapped with engagement and motivation was courage. It was noted explicitly by nine of the participants that when students do well once, there is an increase of belief in self that students build upon, a cycle of positivity that encourages future engagement and motivation. The idea that "success is a habit" was verbalized by three of the participants and summarizes the entire concept.

Engagement. Engagement composes 51% of the data collected. Engagement is characterized by observed behaviors when the students were working directly/interacting with standards-based content for the purpose of learning the material for future assessment. There are 30 codes associated with engagement that are further grouped into the following three subcodes: engagement; positive response; and relationships. The engagement subcode refers to observations of students interacting with standards-based content in a positive and intentional manner. The positive responses subcode refers to the observable behaviors as a response to the activity or the learning. The relationships subcode refers to any impact on relationships as a result of interpersonal interactions or interactions due to the activity or learning. All of the codes represent positive indicators of either teacher or student behaviors. The code "Relationships: Class community/Climate" was identified most often, with 86% of the codes identified in this category.

The subcodes related to engagement are: at risk/struggling kids participate; collaboration (students working together); general increase (this code was used when participants verbalized a

generic “students are more engaged” response); kinesthetic (when students were physically moving around in order to participate in the learning); paying attention (when students were actively looking at the person speaking, nodding, writing things in response, etc.); producing work; and verbal (which was related to any time noted that students were talking about the learning, whether by question or statement). At risk/struggling kids participating was represented by 8% of the responses in the engagement subcode. General increase in engagement (28%), collaboration (23%) and verbal (22%) make up the bulk of the responses. Kinesthetic was found 11% of the time, while paying attention (5%) and producing work (4%) were noted but not as primary components of the participant perceptions.

Positive responses made up 51% of the overall engagement category. Positive responses were evident visibly and/or heard throughout the study and were observed in the areas of: confidence; curiosity; decreased anxiety; desire to learn; energy; excitement; general (used when the engagement was obvious but the impetus behind it was not); higher rigor; humor from students (related to content); increased attendance; laughter, smiling, happy, having fun; more students included; reciprocity of learning (when the students and the teacher both discover new learning during the process); resiliency; social/emotional increases; students feeling safe and/or included; students taking the lead in learning; surprised; trust; and students want to keep going (this includes the idea of “time flying” or lessons moving quickly in a positive way). The climate in the classes were described as “positive” by all participants. There was one student who had returned from an out-of-school suspension and had some negative interactions at first during one of the observations, but they were limited and had dissipated completely by the end of the lesson. The observations did not have any students who remained on the fringe or behaved in a negative manner toward the lesson or the teacher. The only negative interactions

were brief and usually related to an expression of self-doubt, lack of understanding, or frustration based in the competitive nature of some activities. The competitive negatives were natural and appropriate, as observed when one team got ahead of another in completing a task faster and a student cried out, “Oh no! They are ahead! Hurry up!” All students participated in the observed activities. It was evident from a classroom management perspective that the classes had been instructed on appropriate transitions and behavioral expectations.

***Impediments*.** Impediments make up 5% of the data collected. Impediments were identified during the study and the development of codes. They are characterized as behaviors and or experiences that could be observed that demonstrate a rationale for a negative behavior associated with the learning. There are 10 codes in the area of impediments; however, half of them are only found once. Three of the impediment codes were discovered during a classroom observation, the rest were in responses to questions about the teacher’s perceptions about student barriers in school. The study found no evidence of barriers or impediments in the course of the study in any other way.

The codes for impediments are as follows: disengagement or apathy; do not see purpose; entitlement or wanting immediate gratification; lack of work ethic; negative prior experience (this includes gaps in learning, self-beliefs that came from prior education experiences, bad experiences with others, and aversions to a subject or teacher); instructional needs not being met (primarily in the area of time for planning and implementation of instruction); and not in locus of control (this is used when a response is related to family or home life, relationships outside of class environment, poverty, socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, abuse, or other negative contributing factors to the students’ lives). Impediments came up during the interviews primarily with 17 being mentioned in response to questions about teachers’ perceptions related to students

not doing well in school or questions about frustrations they have as teachers. Of the 12 participants, 10 noted that administration provides training on many things but does not provide dedicated time with experts for planning to use what they have just been trained to do, this was coded as an impediment as well. Only three data points showed up in observations alone without being mentioned in the interviews or focus group. All participants commented that impediments are pushed to a "back burner," "diminish," or are not apparent when fun is utilized in instruction because the students with impediments appear to get "caught up" in the lesson and their focus moves to learning rather than to impediments.

All of the participants were frustrated and discouraged by student apathy and disengagement. There was a clear connection, in their opinions, between making excuses and self-doubt. Frustrations included the codes of: assessment (students not doing well despite teacher efforts), impediment of disengagement and apathy, impediment of prior negative experience, impediments not in locus of control (in question three all participants mentioned family or home life issues that hinder students), and the lack of time to be creative and design fun lessons. The participants all indicated that they believe that apathy and disengagement are minimal or non-existent when the lessons are fun.

Instruction. Instruction covers 6% of the data collected. Instruction was characterized by any intentional strategy or interaction utilized by the teacher to impart standards-based, content information to the students, evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016). Three codes are related to "instructional needs" of the participants in order to meet the needs of the students and incorporate fun. In terms of being negative or positive, the consensus among the participants was that if any of those needs were not met, it was difficult or impossible to design and implement the kinds of lessons

with intentional fun that make a difference. The components for instructional need are: aligned with content; appropriate level (the content); and planning and time. Planning and time were mentioned 31 times. Participants were clear that intentional instruction, with or without fun, requires first; planning to ensure alignment to standards; and secondly, preparation to assess the learning and planning requires time.

Motivation. Motivation is represented by 25% of the data collected. There were 13 codes identified related to motivation. Motivation is characterized by individual investment in the learning process in terms of explicit participation (individual and group) as well as task completion and other evidence collected through observation or assessment by the teacher and/or researcher (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016). All of the codes related to motivation are considered to be positive points of data due to the fact that they reflect teacher and student motivational actions or responses. It is impossible to see or measure intrinsic motivation due to the internal processing of human thoughts and emotions, but can be observed by a level of excitement, curiosity, drive and pleasure that are visible. Pink (2011) provided the research that establishes the role of autonomy over the task, the time or the team, the ability to learn and master something, and having a purpose, as the three components necessary to spur effective, enduring, intrinsic motivation.

Autonomy was reflected in the code of instruction in this theme in the code called "instruction: give students choices" which was mentioned or observed by eight of the 12 participants. The second concept, mastery, is reflected in the code "instruction: challenge students". Participants unanimously agreed that when presented with a challenge they believe is pertinent, the students will spend a lot of energy figuring out how to "conquer" the situation and in effect master the knowledge or process. The "engagement: hands-on" code also provided

insight into the desire for mastery. Participants' comments reflected students who engaged in hands-on learning were more likely to attempt the work outside of class for further experimentation or in an attempt to do better on assessment.

Purpose is reflected in the 24 comments or observed behaviors related to the code "relevant: beyond the subject/real-life application. Participants mentioned that videos or memes from pop culture are frequently used as tools to engage students and were considered relevant to the students from the teacher perspective due to things they may have seen students doing, or they believe the students can relate to in other ways. Participants also mentioned showing students a real-life application of the knowledge to encourage motivation and participation. Participants found no distinction in efficacy between relevance in terms of social/personal experiences and relevance in terms of real-life application. The overarching perception was that students only need one rationale or purpose for any given lesson.

Additional areas identified as part of the theme of motivation include: decreased work load; creative, enthusiastic and/or humorous instruction; and fun from a student perspective. The 33 concepts coded "fun: valuable" reflected the perception of the participants that students will come to class and engage when they believe it will be fun. There were four additional codes associated with motivation that all fell under the umbrella of a sense of "willingness" among the students that spurs academic behaviors. The overarching perception was a that the willingness in students came as a result of instructional motivators, and simultaneously triggered additional motivators. The codes related to willingness are: willingness to be challenged, willingness to do "tedious" work, willingness to engage, and willingness to take risks.

The participants all asserted that while having fun students regularly stepped "beyond the comfort zone" and "did more than expected." Six of the 12 participants mentioned the concept

of students being more forgiving of the "boring" times and more willing to do work so that they can effectively participate in the fun activities when they know that fun "is coming." In general, the themes were all clearly identified and put into perspective for the study. All 12 participants indicated, via 33 collective data points, that from their perspective fun is valuable. Responses revolved around the motivation that fun provides and engagement that it inspires. Of the responses, 10 reflected a strong belief that fun is valuable, and the comments include multiple mention of words like, "essential," "vital," and "invaluable" as related to the role of fun in learning. There were 29 comments related to instructional aspects of including fun; five in the area of engagement; 11 in instruction; and 13 in motivation. The need for planning was mentioned by all twelve participants. Creativity was also mentioned by all of the participants. Using relevant topics or hooks was mentioned by 11 of the 12 participants. The intentional process of ensuring all students are included and relationships are nurtured and developed during the activities in the class was also mentioned by 11 of the 12 participants.

Observations. Notes were taken for each observation. Each action of the teacher or students that was observed was noted and assigned one of the codes for the purpose of analysis. Across all six observations there were one hundred and eighty-three codes identified: two in the area of achievement; 82 in the area of engagement; two impediments were noted (a student was slightly concerned at one point, and the personal life a student coming back from an out-of-school suspension also was noted); five codes related to instruction came to light; and 38 in the area of motivation as described by the codes. Each observation demonstrated actions that were covered by at least 15 codes with the majority of observations exhibiting over 30 codes and one was characterized by 47 distinct codes.

Observation 1. This was a lesson in an English class that involved the teacher placing 15 items on a table surrounded by "crime scene tape," addressing the students as "detective," and then ensuring the students knew what the items were. Some were foreign to students and needed to be explained in terms of use and time frame, for example, a bottle of Ipecac (empty) and an 8-track tape. The assignment's objective was to write a mystery story involving five of the items. The teacher used collaborative strategies for brainstorming with peers before having them begin their own work. The observation had 36 codes identified: 22 related to engagement; one related to instruction and 13 related to motivation. The participation in the lesson was evident and comprehensive. No students were observed off-task or disengaged.

Observation 2. This was a lesson in a geometry class where the teacher had brought a small scaled pool table to class. The teacher had students predict angles of trajectory and corresponding angles, as well as determine what angles would be needed for different shots. Students worked collaboratively in small groups to do the math involved, make predictions, attempt their strategies, and determine accuracy of their work. There were 37 codes were identified: one in the area of achievement; 21 in engagement; three in instruction; and 13 in motivation. Energy and competition were present in the class. No negative remarks were overheard, nor negative experiences noted.

Observation 3. This was a lesson from a geography class about economic disparity. The teacher had made a map of the continents on the floor of the classroom. As students entered they drew a continent name out of a bag and were added to the "census" for that continent. The numbers were as follows: Asia – 17 students, Africa – four students, Europe – three students, North America – two students, South America – one student, Australia – one student. The teacher explained the percentages of the world population. The teacher then handed out candy

bars to represent wealth per person in each continent. The amount of candy bars handed to each continent was as follows: Asia—five candy bars, Africa—two candy bars, Europe—10 candy bars, North America—17 candy bars, South America—five candy bars, Australia—10 candy bars. The students then discussed the personal, national and international implications of what they were observing in the activity. All students were engaged in conversation. All students participated. The observation provided evidence for 34 codes: 26 in the area of engagement; one impediment (a student of color was concerned about the impact on her family in another country); and seven related to motivation.

Observation 4. This was from an Advanced Placement Biology class. The teacher had students watch five video clips or memes. The first video showed a person dying in the desert, crawling on their knees and begging for water. Lips were chapped and skin was leathery. The second was a meme about eating too many hot dogs. The third was a video about the man who cut off his own arm when it was trapped by a rock when he was hiking, because he knew he would die if he stayed and waited for help. The fourth was the old commercial where an elderly lady is on the ground and calls on her necklace to the company who can send medical help and says, "I've fallen, and I can't get up!" and the final video was of a woman giving birth. The task was to identify as many class concepts and vocabulary words as possible that would be impacted by the scene or meme for all five scenarios and list them on the paper with the associated picture. Then students needed to pick one scenario and elaborate as to why each card they chose was pertinent. This was the class with the student returning from out-of-school suspension. The student's negativity was for the most part ignored by the rest of the class and dissipated quickly during the lesson. There were 15 codes identified in this observation: nine related to

engagement, one impediment; and five related to motivation. The class was appropriate in their humor and all students worked with others to complete the tasks.

Observation 5. This was from a Spanish 2 class. The lesson was a vocabulary review. It was an activity that is used for every new unit of vocabulary. The students were familiar with the process and rules and quickly moved into the activity. The teacher indicated that one student was the leader. The rest of the students drew a "picture" of a vocabulary word. The rules were that everyone had to have a different word and they could not have any English words, but Spanish words not related to the word they chose were acceptable. For example, a student had the word "sobre" (envelope) so they drew a letter addressed to someone in México. Each student then used tape to hang their picture from the front of the desk so that the other students could see it. The leader made a bat out of poster paper and waited until the teacher was ready. When all the desks were in a circle with pictures hanging so everyone could see, she pointed at each picture and the artist said the vocabulary word in Spanish and the rest of the class repeated it.

When all words had been noted, the teacher said, "¿Listos?" (ready?). The students yelled "¡Sí!" and then she called out one of the vocabulary words. The student with the bat turned to try to locate the desk and headed toward it, but the student at that desk called out another word which then deflected the leader toward the new picture. This continued until there was finally a student who could not think of a new word in time and the leader brought the bat down on her desk. She became the leader and the former leader took her desk and called out the next word. After a couple rounds, the teacher had the students shift two seats to the right and start over with new pictures in front of them. The observation provided 29 data points. There were two related to assessment, 22 in engagement, one impediment, one instructional point, and

three in the area of motivation. All students participated. The climate was very high energy. All students demonstrated learning during the activity.

Observation 6. This was in an Environmental Science class. The teacher had drawn six circles on the walkway in chalk that were 10-feet in diameter. There was a bag for each group that included three, seven-foot-long ropes and the inner tube of a bicycle tire. There were two containers in each circle, a black container half-filled with popcorn, and a white empty container. Half of the black can of popcorn was spilled on the ground within each circle. Teacher took attendance and got class attention, ensured silence before giving instructions. The teacher explained that the popcorn was a deadly waste spill that is currently contained within the circle but will seep into the water table within 30 minutes after the start of the cleanup if not stopped, killing everyone in the galaxy. The teacher gave each student in the groups a role: one leader, two rope masters, and two tube masters. The teacher gave them the following parameters and rules: The contaminated area reaches from floor to ceiling. All of the poison must end up in the white container. The group may only use the ropes provided (three seven-foot-long ropes) and the bicycle inner tube given to each group. No part of anyone's body may cross into the plane of the circle. If any popcorn goes outside the circle, it will explode and destroy the galaxy.

The groups collaborated well. There was competitive banter. There were two groups who were successful in the activity goal, one at minute 22 the other at minute 28. Those teams were asked to go watch the other teams and cheer them on. They were allowed to give advice but could not participate. Teams struggled with manipulation of the materials at first, or speed with which they moved, but adjusted quickly. There was a lot of debate about theories at work until one group actually started trying something and then all groups acted very quickly. There was a lot of trial and error. A few debates about attempts broke out but were redirected quickly by the

leaders, other team mates or the teacher. Groups watched the successes and failures of other groups and adjusted as they went along based on the observations. At the end, there were cries of "Oh no! We died!" Or comparisons with Thanos (the character from the movie *Guardians of the Galaxy* who eliminated half of all living creatures in the universe), "Maybe only half the galaxy died?" There were cheers of success from the teams that "saved the galaxy."

After the activity the teacher debriefed with the class as a whole, standing in a large circle. The students shared their processes. The teacher at the end asked each student to share what they learned about themselves as a team member? Each shared. Some expressed frustration at working with a team under a time constraint, but still reflected on the activity positively. The teacher then told them that they would be doing some work on air quality next and they would need to channel their creative juices. The teacher clearly and explicitly recited the learning targets: Develop Creative Thinking Strategies and Work in a Team. The teacher added that in the real world, team work is a top three thing employers look for right after attendance and teachability. The homework was to write a journal entry in their interactive notebooks about their personal reflections about their own ability to come up with creative solutions to problems and their abilities in team work. They were also to set goals for growing their team abilities. The observation revealed 32 codes. There were 22 in engagement, one impediment identified, and nine in motivation. All students participated. The climate was very high energy. Collaboration was the primary relationship between students.

Data as related to the research question. In answer to the research question, **"**What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?" the data were clear and articulate in terms of the impact. The individual

interviews and the focus group conversations consisted of 15 questions for each group; however, 10 of the questions were identical. The results of the information by question are presented in relation to the research question. The responses to questions that are exclusive to the individual interviews supported the same themes found in the responses to questions exclusive to the focus group; although, the information reflected by one group is limited in the ability to extrapolate laterally across the participant base, but across the board, comments made by participants in one group support the comments made by participants in the other group.

There were 47 comments related to issues with implementation; nine in the area of achievement; six in the area of engagement; 14 impediments; 10 related to instruction; and eight in motivation. Concerns related to the "organized chaos" that can ensue when teachers let students take the lead in their own learning were mentioned as dangerous territory along with the attention teachers need to pay constantly to ensure the focus is on the learning, not the activity itself. However, all 12 participants described in one way or another the processes they use to predict and avoid pitfalls and protect the activity. All similarly noted that learning increased and in most cases learning came easier as well, especially for students who struggled in the past. By making it fun students seem to "fail with more positivity and try again more readily" said one participant in the focus group. The statement was immediately echoed by all of the participants there. The remaining comments centered on effective learning climates with demonstrable academic increases. Students' increased levels of trust and willingness to engage among the students were noted by every participant.

In terms of academic achievement. Participants initially responded quickly with the academic proof of growth and success in terms of assessment, test scores, and grades. However, all participants indicated that the idea that "more students" have positive results in these areas

now as opposed to prior to the implementation of fun strategies is more prevalent. Assessment; engagement (collaboration, general increase, and hands-on); Creative and humorous instruction; the need to be aligned with standards; and positive responses (laughter, smiling, happy having fun; resiliency and surprised) all were present in the responses related to academic success and growth. Participants shared that the primary motivators for them as teachers were: academic growth by students (theme: achievement); positive responses from students (theme: engagement); and the ability to develop and implement fun lessons in the classroom (themes: instructional need and motivation) were the overarching themes of the 12 participants. "Teachers want to do what kids enjoy and that makes it enjoyable for them," said one participant. There were 27 data points that reflected the role of fun in instruction in terms of evidence of importance to the students. Engagement by the students, purposeful work, and visible motivation were the primary responses to this question. The codes involved were: collaboration, verbal engagement, creative instruction (the ability to implement on the part of the teacher), and relevance. Participants all indicated that this was when they "love their job" and "feel like they make a difference" which are the components for them for having fun. "It has to be relevant" is the mantra that was espoused by every participant.

There were 15 responses stating that creative lessons, planning for relevancy, and instructional hooks that pique interest were the concepts of most importance to the question and these fell under the two themes revealed in the coding, motivation and engagement. Games, interactive activities, group collaborative efforts to solve problems, students producing work to share with an outside audience, wearing costumes, doing "shocking" things (for example, jumping up on a chair), and even stand-up comedy (one participant admitted he frequently uses "dad jokes" filled with humor that elicit more groans than laughter) are all examples shared by

participants as tools to bring fun into their instruction. Many of the participants shared that they can use the same format or structure of an activity for different content. Review games in which the game is the same, but the answers revolve around different content is a good example of this kind of "recycling" of fun activities.

Most of the 15 responses in achievement relate to assessment, proving that growth in learning has occurred and the danger of getting off-track or losing sight of the learning in the face of a fun activity has diminished. All 12 of the participants felt that assessment at some level is the only way to validate learning. Therefore, effective instruction results in measurable academic growth. The aspects of instruction mentioned by participants for this question specifically related to creative instruction that engages students and results in academic growth. The cycle of academic success from the perception of the participants is as follows: (a) planned and creative instruction (three data points) that includes fun, (b) increases motivation (21 data points), (c) increases engagement (three data points), and (d) results in academic growth (six data points). All participants stated, in one way or another, that fun makes learning better for both teachers and students. There were 47 comments related to student growth; two in the area of achievement; 19 in the area of engagement; three in instruction; and 23 in motivation. Achievement comments related to students doing well in assessment as a result of the involvement in the learning process. There were 35 comments related to academic impact in general; 13 in the area of achievement; 13 in the area of engagement; two impediments and seven in motivation.

All of the participants were encouraged to develop an intentionally fun lesson for a unit or lesson that had traditionally resulted in low student interest, low grades and low retention over time. All of the participants shared examples of at least one lesson that had increased

performance by students in at least one of those three areas. The overarching perception was that when the teacher has fun and teaches in a creative way, the students engage, and the effect is that the learning "takes on a life of its own" as one participant described.

There were 28 comments related to students, who were at-risk or struggling in the past, doing better with the inclusion of fun; three in the area of achievement; 23 in the area of engagement; one impediment; and one comment in motivation. The responses mirror those related to the social/emotional situation of students, but the main difference lies in the role of success in learning the subject. Participants noted that if a struggling student found success in a simple question, they would be more willing to attempt answering a more difficult question, especially after providing correct responses a few times. The conclusion drawn by a focus group participant was that the teacher needs to "prime the pump by asking questions they know the student can answer without making it look like they are going easy on them" which was supported by the rest of the group. The consensus was that students want to learn, and they want to show they know things, but they do not want to be "babied" by teachers. All participants agreed that questioning strategies are vital, and, if done correctly, can help struggling students immensely.

There were 42 comments that explored the perceptions of the participants related to the ultimate effect of fun in instruction; 16 in the area of achievement; 23 in the area of engagement; two impediments; and one in motivation. The participants discussed the systemic, circular relationships between creativity, motivation, engagement as a cycle that results in increases in learning. According to the responses, there were multiple comments that reflected the following codes: assessment (one comment); impediments that can occur if a class gets off track or out of hand (two comments); increased engagement in general (three comments); increases in students

paying attention, doing work, and collaborating (13 comments); learning being easier and increasing across the board (15 comments); and relationships starting, building or improving and bettering the learning environment (nine comments). Fun was stated by all participants to be of value as was represented by the comment that it is "an essential and effective tool to improve a classroom or school and increase individual student success."

There were 21 comments related to the final thoughts offered by the participants; one in the area of achievement; three in the area of engagement; and 17 in motivation. One participant set the stage for several comments when he remarked, "we all know that fun is beneficial so to get some facts to support it will be good." There were 18 comments about fun being valuable, one about increases in learning, two discussing the increases in student confidence and leadership, and one about community building. The participants emphasized the cyclical nature of the process, as perceived by the participants. All 12 participants additionally discussed the perception that is summed up by a statement from one of the participants, "teaching is harder when the learning or the class is perceived as boring, so you need to figure out how to make it fun."

In terms of social-emotional impact. The social-emotional aspects of the study as presented by the participants uncovered the fact that the bulk of the 14 codes related to impediments are not in the locus of control of the teachers: family life; home life; mental health; romantic relationships; friendships; and how they interact with adults outside of school. The only code mentioned in the responses to this question was one comment by a participant who believed that grades impact students emotionally, if they do well they have a positive outlook on school, if they do poorly, it leads to disengagement. Two participants mentioned school culture

outside of the classroom being a factor as well. The consensus among participants was that teachers need to counteract exterior barriers with instructional actions.

Student engagement and willingness to participate were the overwhelming consensus as 27 comments were reflected in the following areas: general increases in engagement; creative and enthusiastic instruction (with the juxtaposition of the need for planning time); easier learning; reciprocity of learning; and willingness on the part of students to engage and do more rigorous work. "Fun is directly correlated to success, and in school success means learning, so when they succeed we are all having fun" is a comment that encapsulates the perspectives shared for this question. The participants consistently agreed, and 42 data points supported the perception, that creative and enthusiastic instruction that was relevant to the students induced engagement, especially in the areas of collaboration and hands-on or kinesthetic learning. These were then indicated as impetus for the other positive responses (more students participating, at-risk and struggling students participating, students taking the lead, reciprocity of learning) and relationship building.

There were 69 comments related to evidence of the positive impact of fun on the social emotional realm; six in the area of achievement; 53 in the area of engagement; three impediments mentioned; three comments related to instruction; and four in motivation. Verbal engagement and the positive responses of confidence, curiosity, energy, increased attendance were all mentioned as were the 20 responses related to the general atmosphere of laughter, smiling, happy, and having fun. Collaboration and general engagement were aligned with students doing well in class, learning easier, remembering more, and feeling good about their academic achievement. Fun was described as "more of a feeling when things are going well, and all is positive in the class" by one participant. There were 54 comments related to the climate in

the classroom; one in the area of achievement; 43 in the area of engagement; three impediments; and seven in motivation. Positive responses made up 36 of the comments and six related to the relationships in the class as a whole.

There were 38 comments related to the social-emotional impact on students in general; 33 in the area of engagement; one impediment; and four in motivation. The results of this question were fairly repetitive. There was a cycle of behaviors noted by the participants and was fleshed out by the focus group collectively. The perception was that relationships were developed between those with lower emotional and/or social abilities and those who flourish. As the relationships grew, students engaged and made more social connections, emotions became more positive, willingness to engage increased and students did better in class. The resulting positive relationships then started the cycle over again. The only impediment mentioned related to a concern that some students may struggle when confronted with "having to participate" but that was spoken theoretically and none of the participants had any examples of that happening in their classes.

Summary

This qualitative study included individual interviews, a focus group conversation and classroom observations. The perceptions are from 12 participants who are all high school teachers in multiple subject areas. They represent approximately 20% of the regular-education teaching staff. They teach 70% of the student body. The data collected from the individual interviews, focus group conversation and classroom observations produced 764 individual comments or observational data points that were sorted into themes and used to identify 60 individual codes within the five themes of achievement, engagement, impediments, instruction, and motivation. Observations provided 24% of the data, interviews 31% and the focus group

conversation included 45% of the data examined. Fifteen codes were not detected during observations. There were 45 codes developed from the answers given in the interviews, the focus group conversation and observed during the study. There were two codes discovered exclusively during the observations and added to the codes list during analysis.

The themes of engagement and motivation were noted as entirely positive aspects. Achievement had one negative code and three positive codes. The negative code was not observed in the classroom but, as with impediments and instructional needs, it was discussed in the interviews and focus group in response to questions requesting the participants perceptions on the negatives related to their work. There were 14 codes related to some negative concepts and represented 12% of the data; 46 data points were positive responses or observed behaviors and represented 88% of the data.

The questions for the individual interviews and the focus group contained 10 identical questions and five questions exclusive to each group. All positive codes noted in the responses were echoed by multiple participants with 100% consensus on all positive responses as to the value of fun in the classroom and the benefits and results that come from including fun in direct instruction. All six classroom observations provided examples of the codes identified as positive in the interviews and focus group conversation. Engagement and motivation represented 60% of the codes identified. No students were observed off-task for more than a few brief moments which included interjections of humor or personal exchanges, questions related to other things, personal needs (writing utensil, paper, restroom, etc.) and all students interacted with the teacher and other students appropriately. Energy levels were high, students were curious, inquisitive and driven to create or solve problems posed by the teachers. Some students lead, others followed,

some collaborated and shared leadership, but all students observed participated and completed the tasks given.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This study provides data to support the explicit use of fun in instruction as a strategic instructional strategy to positively impact student achievement and social-emotional circumstances in the academic setting. Participant perceptions related to the explicit inclusion of fun in direct instruction are reflected in this case study of 12 teachers who were purposively sampled at a semirural high school of approximately 1,325 students in the Pacific Northwest area of the United States. Due to low graduation rates and high levels of students with low grades, failures, and dropouts (ODE, 2018) the high school faculty had been invited by administration to participate in an experimental instructional initiative to determine if there were positive academic results when fun was purposefully included in direct instruction, and not just as an activity or reward.

The initiative addressed faculty concerns about needing a simple strategy that might combat myriad barriers encountered in the classroom with students of varying levels of ability, need, and supports. Administration provided time for planning and implementation allowing teachers to revamp old lessons or design new direct instructional approaches. Faculty members who volunteered were given instruction and support for the inclusion of the fun instructional strategies. Training was provided on several different options for inclusion, and participants had access to professional development and support throughout the year. The participants volunteered to be interviewed and/or observed toward the end of the school year after having implemented fun in instruction for several months.

The expectation was that the study would provide evidence to support the use of fun as an intentional instructional method as an effective and impactful strategy to improve student

achievement and social-emotional issues that have traditionally plagued educators (Tough, 2014). The perceptions of the participants and the classroom observations provide substantial and meaningful information to inform the academic community in the positive results of using explicit instructional strategies that are fun in direct instruction. The study provided an opportunity to explore the teacher perceptions after a school year of implementation which allowed the participants to have had enough time to fully view the impact of their instruction in multiple areas in the classroom environment and in terms of student achievement.

In order to ensure that this study provided meaningful information it was vital to define fun as it would be utilized in direct instruction. The literature review provided extensive research related to engagement, however, with varying definitions and strategies to assess. In this study engagement was defined as the extent to which a student or group of students is actively interacting with the intended curriculum (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). For the purpose of this study the intended curriculum must be tied to at least one standard (either curricular or career-related) against which the students will be evaluated and/or will facilitate learning the skills needed for future study or work, such as collaboration or personal management.

The analysis in the study includes engagement as an evidential theme. This emerged during the analysis of the coded transcripts that supports the label of fun as related to the definition provided. After evaluating the vocabulary involved that was related to instruction, engagement, and emotions; the definition of fun for the purpose of this study revolved around two distinct components. The first component is an activity that is directly tied to the standards-based content (Schmoker, 2018). The activity could be anything from a class conversation to a game or other participatory element during direct instruction. The second, and more elusive

component required that the activity produce a positive emotional response in the students. Participants worked collaboratively and individually with mentors and other professional educators to identify characteristics of lessons that traditionally invoke positive student reactions and adapted them to their content. Strategies were implemented with the intention of reflecting upon successes and failures in order to hone their craft and revolutionize their own practice.

The participants represented approximately 20% of the faculty and worked with approximately two thirds of the student body. There were six participants who participated in individual interviews and six who participated in a focus group conversation. Interviews and the focus group conversations consisted of 15 questions and responses were recorded and transcribed for coding and thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Three participants from each group volunteered to also be observed in the classroom while using fun in instruction. Observation notes were transcribed for coding and thematic analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The results are discussed thoroughly in this chapter, as well as the relationship of the results to the literature. The immediate impact on the academic community is addressed as well as recommendations for future study that is needed to provide more evidence in both qualitative and quantitative studies. The chapter ends with summary conclusions and recommendations.

Summary of the Results

The research question was, **"**What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school?" All participants expressed support for the conclusion that intentional inclusion of fun in direct instruction significantly improves academic achievement and helps to counteract traditional student social-emotional barriers. Instruction designed for the inclusion of fun universally across all participants included:

alignment to standards, creativity, enthusiasm, choices for students, and humor. Demonstrative proof of increases in participation, engagement, and increases or improvements in learning was provided by all participants in the form of statistics, anecdotal examples, and other evidential information.

According to participants, academic achievement increased across the board in terms group performance and individual improvement among students who had struggled or had other barriers to learning in the past. Students engaged more, took more risks, and worked through tedious or difficult processes with more determination and effort. Positive results included increases in curiosity, classroom energy and excitement, humor from students, resiliency, surprise, and trust. Students were willing to participate in activities that were at higher levels of rigor and delved deeper into the content. Participants also noted increased enthusiasm in their own practice as they observed the positive increases in behaviors and achievement. State test results, formative and summative assessments, and class grades all increased for the majority of students. Increases for students who had traditionally struggled or had been apathetic or disengaged encouraged participants to continue their efforts. The participants provided information and/or anecdotal evidence of the positive impact on academic achievement as a result of the inclusion of fun in instruction.

In the social-emotion realm participants observed increases in: attendance; collaboration; inclusive classroom climate and community; participation of struggling students; participation of students with difficulties; participation of at-risk students; participation of reluctant students; and interpersonal interactions outside of customary peer groups. Participants described a sense of general positivity in their classrooms continuously throughout the year. Students developed social and emotional resiliency and effective inclusion of all students was noted by all

participants. Students of all levels participated in the activities that were observed and it was noticed that there were no reluctant participants once the activities began.

Numerical or statistical information to support the participants' perceptions was described as follows: increases in class averages ranging from 5% to 22%; decreases in the number of failing students and underachieving students; state test scores reflecting a significant decrease in students with the lowest score rating; and an increase in the number of students meeting and exceeding the standards. Participants provided ample evidence, information and/or anecdotal evidence of the positive impact on academic achievement as a result of the inclusion of fun in instruction. After coding, there were 764 different data points (comments and/or observations) scaffolded under 60 different codes: 45% from the focus group conversation; 31% from individual interviews; and 24% from classroom observations. The following themes emerged from the data: achievement, engagement, impediments, instruction, and motivation. Each code identified in the analysis of the transcripts was sorted into one of the themes for further interpretation. Achievement composed 12% of the data, engagement 51%, Impediments 5%, Instruction 6%, and motivation produced 25%. Responses or observations that could be deemed as negative came almost exclusively from verbal responses to questions related to participant perceptions related to impediments, barriers, or other contributing factors to student issues in the academic or social-emotional realm. There were only two observable circumstances that could be deemed as negative, both were mitigated by the activity used in instruction by the teacher.

Discussion of the Results

In order to respond with the data to the research question, it is important to look at the two components that need to be evaluated as incorporated in the research question: academic success and social-emotional behavior.

What are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school? The short answer is that all participants in the study found the explicit inclusion of fun in direct instruction invaluable in both the academic and social-emotional realms. In order to inform the academic community in a substantiated and meaningful manner, the response in this section is broken down into the two different realms, the academic side and the social-emotional side. The themes that emerged in the data analysis were as follows: achievement, engagement, impediments, instruction, and motivation. These themes are reflected individually in both categories in the research question in the discussion of the results that are presented here below in the sections that follow.

A cyclical process evolved during the analysis of the responses and observations. The cycle is as follows: standards-based curriculum expressed through fun instruction creates motivation and engagement, which increases learning and produces higher assessment scores or grades, which reinforces motivation and engagement, and this all culminates in willingness to go the next step in the learning with increased levels of rigor and the use of higher-level thinking skills. When fun is not a part of the equation, motivation and engagement are dependent upon the individual student's desire to learn, or not. Intentional fun combats barriers and creates an in-road for learning that is more productive and long-lasting.

Academic success. Academic success can be described as resting or reliant on three things, rather like a three-legged stool. The three legs supporting academic success are curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). The staff at the high school refer to this as the same acronym as the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA and this has been appropriate in the academic world because a universal, scalable model to provide continuous academic success has been just as elusive as a CIA operative, and just as hard to identify. However, this may be because all efforts were designed around the results, rather than the process. Assessment is vital, but it is also contingent, and the debate in education has revolved around what exactly what academic growth is contingent upon, and how to capitalize on the components that work without breaking the academic bank account of schools. The theme of achievement revolves primarily around the need to use some form of assessment to prove academic increases, improvement, or growth. All participants mentioned assessment, utilizing both formative and summative methods, as the only way to concretely determine academic movement by a student. Participants reinforced the importance of ensuring that all activities and instruction be aligned to standards and assessed.

The participants all warned against having fun for fun's sake, stating that a lack of content purpose can work against long-term learning because students will participate in the fun activity, learn virtually nothing new and then protest when the tougher learning lessons are presented. Participant perception is that achievement can go down when fun activities are used independent from the learning because the students do the fun things but resort to typical disengagement as soon as the focus goes back to the learning. The relationship between standards and content must be clearly visible to the students and the teachers (Schmoker, 2018).

These connections were mentioned repeatedly in the responses from the participants and support the research of noted academics such as Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000), Schmoker (2018), and Stake (2004). All participants mentioned statistics in their own practice that supported their claims that achievement has improved at the individual and group levels since the intentional inclusion of fun. Thus, the supported conclusion is that lessons with intentional fun increase student achievement. Some nuances that were articulated in the study. The inclusion of fun was explicitly described as contributing to some positive side-effects that enhanced the learning process and eventually increased assessment scores and grades. It was noted that students learned more easily and were not as affected by learning barriers, including social and emotional issues, which is explained thoroughly in the next section.

The themes of impediments and instruction are significantly intertwined as expressed by the participants and their experiences reflect the research. Both themes include items specifically related to academic success. There are two kinds of impediments exposed in this study, student impediments that interfere with the educational process such as social-emotional barriers (Tough, 2014), and administrative or teacher-based impediments that make adding fun difficult (Schmoker, 2018). Instruction was always associated in answers related to impediments. The participants described the need for time as a primary consideration. It was mentioned repeatedly that programs or strategies that require training are often implemented without the addition of time in which to plan the effective implementation.

The needs of participants included the need to, firstly, ensure that the lessons they are planning are explicitly aligned with at least one standard; and, secondly, determine the type of activity that would convey the lesson effectively and be fun for the students. Upon determining the activity, the need then became the time for gathering the materials and setting up the situation

physically and materially in order to be prepared for the students. Time to work with teachers from multiple subjects was found valuable by the participants in that by collaborating about a lesson the teachers could brainstorm and help each other create a well-designed activity that might touch on skills used in other classes. One social studies teacher commented that they had students who told them about how they had used learning from the history class in their language arts class and their environmental science class as well.

The connections between the different subjects was considered beneficial by participants and supports the work of Pink (2011) related to purpose. In terms of impediments, the lack of administrative support, the absence of time to design the lessons, and the inability to collaborate were all clearly identified as impediments to effective instruction in general, and specifically as related to incorporating fun in direct instruction making it hard or impossible for participants to achieve the intended response of learning and increase achievement levels.

Student impediments include personal difficulties, issues with learning, and social or emotional circumstances. Learning difficulties, for example special education students with disabilities who need additional supports, are complicated. All participants related information about how a single student can disrupt an entire class in many ways. For example, emotional outbursts, blatant disrespect, bullying (of students and by students), intellectual barriers due to disabilities, negative self-perceptions, and many other things can lead a teacher to utilize much of the limited class time dealing with things that have nothing to do with the intended learning and potentially disturb the climate so carefully crafted by a teacher. Participants also shared that students with socialization problems or emotional issues can hijack a class with unnecessary and detrimental drama. The study revealed that the inclusion of fun by teachers impacted individual student behaviors positively, in that the behaviors decreased or disappeared during the

instruction and learning did occur as demonstrated during assessment of the lesson content. Participants stated that students who had traditionally, in essence, distracted themselves out of learning, had fun and then actually learned the content and were able to demonstrate the learning when they took the test or completed the assessed work successfully. This finding is supported by the work of Schmoker (2018) related to learning increases when instruction is focused on the objectives.

Class management and instruction were noted as the primary tools used by participants to combat the impediments. It is often hard to differentiate instruction enough to accommodate all student needs if there are multiple students with myriad issues. During instruction that explicitly included fun, the participants noted that the traditionally disruptive students appeared curious and would contain their usual behaviors in order to see what was coming. The study reflects a distinct absence of issues impacting learning when fun is included in direct instruction. Participant perception in this area is best summed up by a Language Arts teacher, "they are so curious to see what the activity is that they forget to be negative, and by the time the activity starts, they are too invested in the idea of the fun that they come along for the ride, and then are shocked when they realize they were tricked into learning."

There were impediments mentioned by participants that consisted mainly of what participants described as a *lack* or *need*; for example, the lack of time or resources. Other areas of need incuded the lack of clarity about the appropriate role of fun in school. Prior to the initiative, the inclusion of fun has been largely subjective and due to personal preferences of the teachers (Stryon & Stryon, 2012). Participants related experiences of administration forbidding activities that they perceived as chaotic or disruptive without taking the time to learn about the alignment to the content and hence appropriateness of the activity. There were also examples of

the loss of instructional time to be used for administrative needs rather than curricular, for example, giving up class time for students to take a survey. There is a need for communication and understanding of the activities conducted by teachers. Participants also noted that a lack of time and training can be a serious impediment to including fun in instruction because teachers need time to plan, time to implement, and time to evaluate. Other impediments noted were the need to keep classroom management in the forefront to ensure that the activities stay on track, student safety (physical and emotional) is protected, and results support the work. It was mentioned and supported by all participants that when they had time to plan and incorporate fun effectively in their instruction, and they prepared for distractions or managed chaos appropriately, impediments were, by and large, completely mitigated. Summing up the thoughts here, standards-based content delivered with the intentional inclusion of fun increases student achievement.

Social-emotional impact. Much of the research conducted related to this study relates to emotions and the impact emotions have on individuals. In terms of school, the participants noted in every circumstance that student emotions often determine student success because students' self-perceptions significantly impact academic and social-emotional outcomes. Participants related multiple examples of the positive effect of the inclusion of fun in instruction. Students who are traditionally marginalized were included. Students who had struggled before, engaged and found more success. Students with difficulties in learning were described by participants as having more patience with the learning when it was presented in a fun way. It was also universally noted by participants that the students were willing to have higher levels of rigor in the learning as well. The work of Pink (2011) supports this finding due to the nature of the ability to master something as a primary component of intrinsic motivation.

In terms of social-emotional correlations participants noted that in regard to the management aspect, teachers need to teach the expected and appropriate ways to interact. Participants shared that once students understood the expectations, they would often hold each other accountable and find ways to support and encourage each other. It was noted during observation by a participant that, "the only negative interactions were brief and usually related to an expression of self-doubt, lack of understanding, or frustration." Teachers also mentioned that the cliques that had permeated the classrooms before were virtually non-existent within the classrooms in which fun was a constant. Participants also elaborated on the sense of general positivity that grew over time. As students found the teachers including fun on a regular basis, they would increase participation over levels in the past, especially reluctant learners. It was articulated that if teachers explained the explicit rules related to polite interactions, respect for all views and ideas, and enforced the expectations consistently, the students trusted the teacher and their peers more with each interaction until the classroom developed a consistent level of positivity and engagement. The pervasive positivity allowed students to receive work that was more tedious, or at a higher level with patience and willingness. Also, participants found increased attendance from students who had prior skipped class on a regular basis.

Participants also expressed that there was more compassion between students related to students who traditionally were marginalized or reluctant. Self-image/perception barriers were diminished as peers said encouraging things to students as they processed the learning. Participants reported that students who struggled with learning content or process often found the activities made it easier for them to remember details that they had found elusive before. Half of the participants noted an increase in students congregating in their classrooms during non-instructional periods of the day. The students would eat or study or work on activities in a

relaxed setting that was welcoming and positive. This supports the research of Achor (2011) who discusses happiness as a catalyst for comfort.

Participants provided information that exposes a cycle of actions and reactions that, when addressed systematically, mitigate negative barriers in the learning setting. Figure 9 shows the cycle which acts similarly to a chain reaction. Fun is listed as a single word because within the cycle the process begins with instructional fun coming from the teacher and ends with the class being fun for both learners and teachers. Academic levels at the individual and group level increased. Social and emotional barriers were diminished and/or mitigated. Instruction is more efficacious, and learning is supported. Impediments can be addressed or eliminated with the effective explicit planning and implementation of fun in direct instruction. The participants all described portions of the process articulately, and some described the process in its entirety which provides the foundation for the findings of this study.

The revelation that fun increases learning and improves social-emotional circumstances is not a new thought, but the exact areas improved, and the way behaviors and results were impacted, were exposed and examined in this study. The cycle related to fun is an effective and enjoyable process that takes work to set up but, according to participants, provides immeasurable benefits. In summary, the participants provided substantial evidence that there were substantive and substantial increases in learning, positive classroom climate, and student and teacher satisfaction and enjoyment of the academic process and setting.

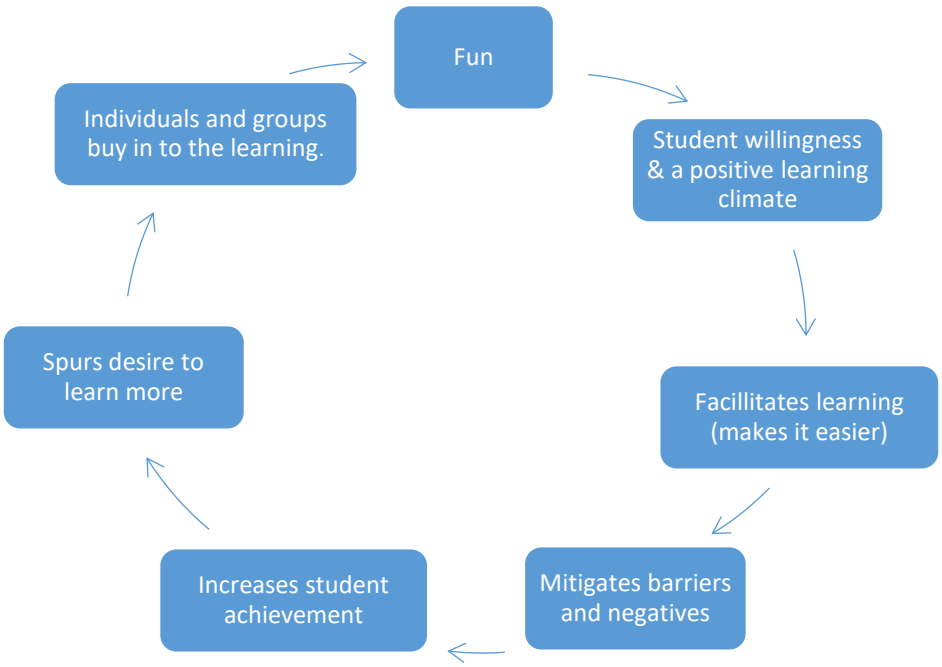

Figure 9. The cycle of effects from the inclusion of fun.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Prior studies addressed individual components related to learning and social-emotional impact on academic success. The implications for the academic community from this research study differ from previous research. The literature revealed an interconnected series of cause and effect relationships between different aspects. The results from this study in relation to the literature add new insights in the areas of instruction and motivation. The academic community is enhanced by the perceptions of the participants in that this research study provides concrete examples and results that add to the prior literature. The results indicted that scholars in the future will benefit from intentional inclusion of fun in instruction.

In relation to the academic community. An example of previously acknowledged downward spiraling that students experience analogizes the root of one of the main problems in the academic setting. Negative self-perception leads to withdrawal from the learning process, which creates gaps or slow-downs in the learning process, which leads to failure, remediation

and a more dramatic negative view of self, creating a need for new strategies to combat the issues. Another example would be the student who is not able to be in the same class as their friends because they are not considered by faculty to be at the same level. The removal of the peer group can lead to isolation, depression, and negative self-perception, which then sends them into the negative cycle demonstrated in the first example (Fridja & Mesquita, 2000).

There are as many reasons that students struggle academically, socially or emotionally. Learning is convoluted when dissected and each aspect researched independently (Driscoll & Powell, 2016). Motivation was investigated by Pink (2011). Negative emotions are detrimental to learning (Barrett, 2018). Emotional Intelligence (EI) as explored by Dolev and Leshem (2016) use EI as a predictor for learning, and in general, emotions can get in the way of self-belief that supports learning leaving students feeling incapable of academic success (Ascioglu Onal & Yalcin, 2017). The research provides substantial information about the contributing factors to each of the aspects involved in learning, but this study looks at fun as a catalyst for jumping over most of the barriers encountered in the learning process. In short, the academic community can look down a new avenue in the quest to improve learning and increase academic levels of success for students and educators.

Fun removes negative barriers and creates a flow that supports learning (Plester et al., 2015). Fun is directly correlated to play, and play is an effective combatant of negatives related to social interactions and emotional circumstances or behaviors and if used as an instructional strategy/intervention, and can improve academic experiences, growth and success (Eberle, 2014; Mathers, 2008) and (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). As the literature revealed, fun mitigates negatives (Plester et al., 2015), and enhances or develops motivation (Plester & Hutchison, 2016). Humor reduces stress and anxiety and increases fun (Randler et al., 2016) and fosters positive relations,

and develops creativity (Nass & Yen, 2012). In terms of learning, students expend more energy when they play and have fun (Mathers, 2008) and teachers can focus the power of fun by incorporating explicit instructional actions that are fun and do not rely upon personality or skill.

In relation to the literature. Since there are no quantitative studies that show any measurable correlations specifically between fun and academic success, this study fills a gap by providing qualitative data that demonstrates the natural connections between fun and learning and the improved results in academic success. There are ways in which this study connects fun to demonstrable academic and social emotional success that have simply not been explored before. Emotions, motivation and self-perception are thoroughly explored in relation to learning by Saarni (1999), Davis and Leslie (2015), Kang (2015), and Barrett (2018). The literature has remained silent to date as to the impact of fun as a strategy, rather than a side effect. The prior research hints at pleasure in experiences but does not address the idea of fun in terms of being a quantifiable or qualifiable and viable manner for learning new content.

This study fills a gap in the academic literature related to fun as a strategic concept and provide impetus to do further research in terms of gathering quantitative data to determine statistical significance, or not, of the impact of fun on academic success and social emotional behaviors. The results of the study support the premise that having fun can be a purpose in and of itself. When coupled with the research on motivation (Pink, 2011) related to developing mastery over the action that is fun, having fun becomes the reason students want to learn despite prior barriers.

In relation to the community of scholars. Learning should be fun and should inspire further learning. Children are naturally curious but by the time they reach high school apathy and disengagement are rampant (Pink, 2011). Teaching should be creative and engage students

but the impetus to pass high-stakes tests and produce successful students often results in the removal of fun in order to drill content which in a sense drives all the fun out of learning (Burgess, 2012). This study provides insight into the role fun plays in the classroom. Twelve teachers, who instruct over two-thirds of the students in their high school shared perceptions that provide significant support for the premise that having fun in school is not a distraction, but rather an essential learning strategy that can mitigate enough barriers to learning to make learning easier and more desirable to students.

When presented with fun activities to learn content all students engaged at higher levels than before and provided evidence of learning when assessed. Fun activities mitigated social and emotional barriers that had plagued classrooms before. Fun developed positive classroom climates that nurtured students and increased scaffolding for further work in the subject. Fun made a marked difference in overall classroom climate. The teachers whose classrooms were part of the study reflected over and over the perception that the general positivity in the classroom and the enhanced relationships (student to student and student to teacher) created climates of creativity and willingness to participate and do work at higher levels. Students were perceived to be more forgiving of the times when fun was not included because they knew they would need the information for the fun activity that would help them eventually demonstrate their knowledge in assessment which is vital in best practice instruction (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

This study informs the literature and reflects the need to integrate fun in direct instruction as an effective educational strategy. The results present compelling evidence that fun can take the place of many of the programs that are designed to attack one or two barriers to learning. The demands at the district, state and national level to meet standards have eliminated many

activities considered extraneous, but students found fun. This, unfortunately, has in turn, created instructional strategies that ignore the students' natural curiosity and desire to learn. Students find themselves discouraged when the primary instructional styles are difficult in general, but it can be even harder when the learning is not fun for them. This study provides evidence that a fun activity will engage students and allow them to process learning in their own way as they develop relationships and collaboration skills that will facilitate more learning as they go along.

Limitations

Individual perceptions can only reflect upon the experience and the information they experienced during the process. This inherently creates limitations of memory and personal perception. While participants were given assurances of confidentiality, there is no way to ensure that every participant felt entirely comfortable for the entire length of the study, and there may have been information omitted by participants for personal reasons and not disclosed during the study. Due to time constraints it is possible that more new information may have been disclosed had there been time to converse more about the responses, and therefore information may be more limited than if there had been more time devoted to interviews and the focus group. However, the repetitive responses in the variety of settings indicate that most of the information gathered was universal and supported by most, if not all participants.

This study did not include a statistical analysis of student grades, scores, or abilities. This made it impossible to utilize quantitative methods. Therefore, while learning increased, there are no statistics to demonstrate how much as a result of fun in instruction. Equally difficult to measure in general is social and emotional level, and in this study, there is no way to measure the extent to which fun positively impacted students in that realm. Although the classes involved

included students of varying levels in terms of ability, behavior and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is possible that there are groups that were not included in the research sample.

There was no control group; however, most of the participants indicated that they had revamped lessons they had taught before and were able to determine notable differences between the lessons taught in prior, traditional ways, and the new lessons with intentional fun strategies. In all instances there was a difference according to participants. Since teachers in this study were instructed in the implementation of fun as an instructional strategy, and all had been implementing fun prior to the study, there was a shared understanding of the definition of fun and the expectations of the process. It is possible that participants may have deviated from the expectations or done other actions that could have produced similar results, but not as a result of fun in direct instruction.

Validation, credibility, and dependability. Individual honesty in the process was assumed and incorporated the idea that participants had "best intent" in the sharing of personal experiences and information. A study of perceptions rather than academic scores of the students limited analysis, but still provided information as to what next to study. The study included teacher perceptions of changes in student learning. Perceptions needed to be as objective as possible in order to validate the study. Every effort was made to ensure the study was objective and relied upon evidence that could be coded and used for analysis. To ensure credibility, interviews were confidential and reported without identifiers. All questioning began with the disclaimer that information would be kept confidential. Participants gave evidence to support the perceptions they developed.

There were follow up conversations with participants as necessary in order to confirm language related to coding meant what the participants intended. No participants were informed

about prior research nor personal hypothesis related to the expected findings. This was to minimize bias or changes in actions by participants. Credibility of the study depended upon personal information, based on the experiences related to the study from each participant. The dependability of the study is supported by the longitudinal implementation of the inclusion of fun over the course of a school year, and not for a one-time activity or short-term unit. The focus group and individual interviews prompted reflection and personal perceptions. The information gathered during interviews and the focus group conversation was supported by what was seen during the classroom observations.

To mitigate these limitations and provide greater levels of validation, credibility and dependability, future studies should be in a variety of circumstances to confirm or challenge these results. A larger district with multiple high schools, a very large high school with more students, and a very small high school would all be meaningful contributors to the academic discussion spurred by this study. It would be beneficial to explore the different levels of schools in the academic system, therefore elementary and middle schools (or junior high schools) should be studied. A very large district could provide control groups and the ability to mimic the actual percentages in the actual populations of participants and related students. Studies with any of these changes would provide needed data to enhance the topic and inform the academic community.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Fun in direct instruction makes a positive and substantial difference in academic success levels and in the social-emotional experiences of students as related to education. The main theory of this study was based on the following foundations: treat the whole child, individual learning is not finite, intrinsic motivation requires new strategies, and teaching needs to be

creative, and learning needs to be fun. Educators must support the whole child as they educate. This is supported by the work of Dewey (1916) that requires of education the considerations needed to create mentally strong, effective and productive citizens, or the academic community fails society. The work of Dweck (2007) clearly supports the notion that mental capacity is not finite. This means that students can learn continuously and are not limited in how much they can learn. With the addition of one word, one of the participants addresses this in her classroom. When a student says, "I don't know how to do this," she simply replies, "yet."

Pink (2011) argued that the newer generations of learners are no longer motivated by carrots and sticks, but rather they need a purpose, the ability to master the content, and some autonomy in how they do it. With that backdrop, the work of Burgess (2012) related to instructional creativity was the spark that gave form to this study. The results were more concrete than expected, considering the qualitative nature of the study. There was a clear message from the participants that fun when used in instruction made such a difference in their practice that no other program can compare. As one participant stated, "we should start with fun and ensure the kids buy in to what we are selling and *then* see where they need supports."

Implications for professional practice. The implications for professional practice start with the participant statement above. Simply stated, teachers need to purposefully inject fun into as many areas of instruction as possible, from day one. The cycle uncovered by the study is as follows, exposure to fun decreases stress and anxiety and nurtures relationships. Relationships prompt positive responses between teachers and students. The anticipation of fun triggers curiosity and transforms to participation in the activity. If the teacher ensures emotional and social safety, trust develops, courage is rewarded, and engagement grows. Once engaged, the informal learning garnered in collaboration with other students as they participate supports the

formal learning prompted by the teacher. Learning comes more easily, which increases confidence, and results in deeper learning. Deeper learning results in more success in assessment and better grades. Better grades increase confidence and trigger the inherent desire to develop mastery of the topic which helps to sow intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation gives learning a life of its own that transcends the classroom.

Administrators should provide large segments of uninterrupted time for teachers to collaborate with teams that they choose to join. This should not be intermixed with content area training or data work. Lesson planning time should be part of the paid teacher preparation time. Teachers should be given support to develop creative fun lessons. Collaborative brainstorm sessions develop ideas, and then the team can help an individual teacher adapt their lessons. The participants in this study would describe the lesson content to each other during collaboration time provided during early release time on Wednesday afternoons, and then the team would brainstorm activities that could transport the learning effectively. Then the team would hone the ideas and ensure that there was continuity and that fun was front and center as the vehicle for the lesson. Administration must be clear on the expectations and should frequently observe instruction to provide meaningful feedback and encourage the process.

The participants in the study all stated that the types of fun they had used before were limited, used as attempted hooks before teaching, or as rewards for having done something. All of them recognized that planning fun instruction takes a lot more thought and creativity than traditional instruction, but creative thinking grew as they did more and more of it. One participant said,

> I used to start class with a meme or a joke on the board, it made kids smile sometimes, but after a few days, they stopped looking at them and would just visit with their friends

> until class "really started," when I started using fun triggers and activities during my instruction, they never knew what was coming next, and they all paid attention to see what I had in store for them.

The fact that some students need additional supports is undeniable; however, educators currently begin support with the supposition that students will continuously struggle from the get-go. This may be a detrimental approach. The study revealed that students with disabilities, reluctant learners, and student who are considered at-risk all engaged on a regular basis when fun was included in instruction. According to participants, the perception was that this was attributed to the informal learning support students gave and received as they helped each other during the activities, as well as the increased level of willingness to participate. Participants stated that achievement increased across the board including those populations.

Half of the participants posited that the presumptive labels imposed by special education law can create stigma or isolation that draws negative attention to some students. The overall perception was that these labeled groups of students often have low self-esteem that gets progressively more negative as the students buy-in to the idea that they are so different from their non-labeled peers. The participants suggested that teachers should be allowed to start with fun as a strategy and during assessment determine which students may need support or intervention and then work with support teams to address all students (regardless of label) who need additional instruction to keep up with the rest of the class. One participant said,

> I used to start by figuring out who my SPED kids were and getting them hooked up with interventions right away. Many of them would shut down right away and buy in to a learned helplessness and inordinate numbers of them fail from day one. Now I don't even look at IEPs. I teach in a fun way, have mixed groups work on the learning together

and then I assess each lesson and see who needs to learn a concept; and then I have all kids with the same issue work with me or my assistant on the skill, regardless of whether they have an IEP. The kids all know that I will help everyone the same way and there are less divisions of clique or class than ever in my 15 years of teaching.

Implementation involves the explicit inclusion of fun in as many aspects of the class as possible. Examples shared by participants included: a fun way of taking role; humorous ways to practice or memorize vocabulary, rules, or processes; mysteries to solve that require using the content information to get the answers; wearing costumes to enhance a lesson; using special effects; instructing without talking by using charades; and rapping or singing the lesson and making the students learn the song. The options are limitless. Some ideas do require funds for materials or supplies, but many can be done with nothing other than the teachers themselves. Administration should discuss budgetary needs with the faculty and try to support activities that will enhance the classroom with the inclusion of fun.

Additionally, the study revealed that there is a generalized increase in positive classroom climate as a result of the inclusion of fun. It prompts supposition that including fun in other aspects of school might develop or enhance the climate of the whole school which fits in with the work of Burgess (2012) that indicates that these kinds of hooks pull students into the learning environment and then subsequently into the actual learning. One participant mentioned that they wished that there was upbeat, fun music played in the halls during passing time, songs that would be short enough to fit in the 5-minute time between the end of class bell and the tardy bell. They thought that if students knew that once the song ended, they would be tardy, it would make getting to class on time easier and more fun for everyone. The study results indicate that announcements done in a fun way, creative posters and signs that change periodically, and other

creative and entertaining platforms for conveying information from administration to students or teachers will increase memory and recall of the information. These ideas relate to the conceptual framework in terms of motivation (Pink, 2011) and the importance of addressing the whole child and help them learn how to function and participate positively in society (Dewey, 1916).

Implications for policy. Federal and state laws related to standards and high stakes testing create a Catch-22 situation. Negative repercussions placed on educators create a climate of anxiety and fear that prompts administrators to require more and more "core" content focus and remediation of the basics which then eliminates many of the fun things that support engagement, participation and learning. Testing pressure can decrease learning, and decreased learning leads to poor test scores. Increases in core content, primarily reading, writing and math, create decreases in time for other subjects. Participants explained that elective choices find themselves on the chopping block as more core teachers are hired so that more students can take additional "lab classes" or "support classes." In the high school of the study, some students have two language arts classes and two math classes at the same time, in order to meet graduation requirements. Participants indicated that once a student fails Algebra or Language Arts 9, they are at very high risk for extreme disengagement in school across the board as elective periods are filled with remediation. One participant described it as, "the beatings will continue until morale improves." The academic implications of current policies are evident in fluctuating achievement levels over time (ODE, 2018).

Policy makers need to revisit the standards conversation in terms of what information taught in school needs to be required by law. To put this in perspective there is an example of an extraneous, subjective standard required in Oregon. This law had been created by the legislature due to the bill put forward by one individual who believed that the Irish Famine was important

enough for every student to be required to learn about it. In 2009, Oregon State law in the form of Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) Chapter 336.116[1] the following requirement was still on the books as a required part of education for every student in the state:

> Unit of instruction on Irish Famine (1) Every public kindergarten through grade 12 school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on the causes and effects of mass starvation in mid–19th century Ireland. This historical period is known as the "Irish Famine." (2) The Department of Education shall prepare and make available to all school district boards a model curriculum that may be used as a guideline for developing units of instruction under this section. [1999 c.516 §1], (ORS, 2009).

Laws determine content standards. Often, the standards are based on ideas that are important to the lawmakers, but not necessarily needed by all students. Citizenship is no longer assessed or encouraged in many areas. Government is still required, but current events and civics are up to the discretion of the teachers. The perception of the participants is that the curiosity engendered in students when they are having fun is a far more powerful tool for prompting exploration in the academic world than any other single strategy. The consensus among participants was that it would better for students if there were an emphasis on having fun as they learn and teaching them how to have fun as they study. A decrease in punitive measures against educators could take some of the pressure off teachers and make administrative support for using fun techniques a more likely possibility. Additionally, if state departments of education, and teacher education programs at the university level provided training in the incorporation of fun in instruction, the shift would begin at the elementary level where natural

curiosity and inquisitiveness can often be squelched in the attempt to ensure they meet the standards expected of 5- and 6-year olds.

Implications related to educational theory. Dewey (1916) argued educators must treat the whole child. The theory is that fun acts as a catalyst to combat barriers at the core of each child. Fun impacts students positively in terms of their abilities, emotions, relationships and self-perception. The study reflects positive results from the inclusion of fun. Students who have fun feel better, have better academic results, develop better emotional resiliency, and do better in school. This one strategy addresses the most impactful areas of the child, their emotions, their relationships and their level of success. The academic community would do well to explore the reaches of the power of these fun strategies. The growth mindset (Dweck, 2007) supports the theory that fun will increase achievement consistently over time. Prior research is reinforced and supported by the results uncovered in this study. Fun in instruction is the cornerstone of the work of Burgess (2012) and the three components of motivation as honed by Pink (2011) are front and center in this theory. Students who have fun find intrinsic motivation to learn more and with depth. In theory, a shift in focus to fun in instruction could be revolutionary.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study provides support for the conclusion that including fun in instruction increases student achievement and produces beneficial results for students in the social and emotional realms in a mid-size school of approximately 1,325 students in a semirural community. The academic community has uncovered many of the components discussed in the study such as motivation, engagement, emotions, self-perception, academic interventions, among others. However, the results stand alone at the high school level as a case study with no quantitative information from which to render statistics. The perspective of 12 participants in a faculty of 60

or so may vary distinctly from 20 teachers in a faculty of 100, or of 200 among 1,000. The related literature explored prior to the study by other academics has been validated by multiple studies in different sized schools and districts. The results of this case study provide extensive evidence of a potentially statistically significant correlation between the inclusion of fun as an intentional instructional strategy and quantifiable gains in student achievement. Future research should be explored, at a minimum, in three scenarios: a case study in a smaller high school; longitudinal case studies at the elementary and middle school or junior high levels; and case studies accompanied by a quantitative study of a larger district that has at least two high schools and can provide a control group.

A case study at a smaller high school will assist with determining scalability and feasibility of future implementation within a wider audience. Schools that are smaller have different budgets, teachers teaching multiple courses, and sometimes varying degrees of support for innovative approaches to the challenges that education faces. Conversely, smaller schools may have some potentially dramatic results in the school climate because smaller schools often have a very interconnected student body, staff, and community. The inclusion of fun could also potentially be not as noticeable in the social-emotional realm if the student body is already a tight-knit learning community. It would be important to seek smaller schools that are plagued with academic issues in order to validate or contradict the findings of this study.

A longitudinal case study at the elementary level would be effective for observing gains in learning over time and eventually producing evidence about the inclusion of fun at the elementary level on success at the middle/junior high and high school levels. The lesser number of high stakes assessments can be mitigated by assessing levels of reading, writing, and mathematical abilities over time compared to control groups. A longitudinal middle school or

junior high-level case study would be able to observe high school readiness and success differences between groups utilizing fun in instruction versus control groups. Passage of core classes and changes in the number of failures at the high school level, along with graduation and drop-out data would all be valuable research topics.

A larger district would be able to provide a rich backdrop from which to do longitudinal studies, comparative studies between control groups and study groups, and case studies at all levels. Quantitative information from a large district would be invaluable in this area of research. The important factors to consider in a larger district would be the selection of schools to implement fun in instruction. A school with high turnover in staff could be problematic for a longitudinal study but could provide significant data related to the stability of the strategies in the face of staff changes. Inner-city schools and schools in high socioeconomic areas should all be included in future research to explore the impact in all academic settings. The results of this study are compelling enough to warrant further exploration to enhance the scope and impact over time and across a solid foundation in a variety of circumstances.

Conclusion

Recent generations of students behave and learn differently than in years past, and student achievement fluctuates from state to state, city to city, school to school, and teacher to teacher. Student achievement success is the nationwide goal for educators. Student social and emotional needs are changing with the times and in many cases become detrimental to learning. Districts spend thousands of dollars on innumerable programs, materials, trainings, and other professional development in order to arm classroom teachers with an arsenal of strategies to combat apathy, disengagement, gaps in learning, reluctant learners, students with social and emotional issues, mental inability, learning disabilities, and the list can continue. There are as

many programs as there are issues, and training, planning, implementing, and assessing success of programs swallows up the limited discretionary time of teachers.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of fun as part of their instructional practice; as well as, the specific role of "fun" as a catalyst to triggering many of the positive aspects of the social-emotional tie to learning. This study was conducted in a district that was attempting to combat the myriad issues with a singular strategy in hopes that it would address more than one of the problems present in the school. The strategy may appear overly simplistic and maybe even trite at first glance, but as this study uncovered, it is potentially a powerful, scalable, and viable new strategy for the academic community. The explicit use of fun as an instructional strategy produced substantive information that warrants further exploration, implementation and research.

The literature review revealed a gap in the research. There were many studies related to student achievement and social emotional circumstances related to learning. There were mentions of fun in the literature as well, but not explicitly in an academic setting as part of direct instruction. The research question that guided the study was, what are the perceptions of high school teachers regarding the use of activities that have been determined to be fun as explicit instructional strategies in terms of academic success and social-emotional behavior in school? The conceptual framework was scaffolded on the work of Dewey (1916) relative to educating the whole student, the work of Dweck (2007) that espouses the growth mindset of students, the findings of Pink (2011) related to motivation, and the enthusiasm for creative instruction as proposed by Burgess (2012).

A group of 12 teachers, who were composed of 20% of the faculty and instructed two-thirds of the students in the school. These were teachers who had been implementing fun as an

explicit and integral part of direct instruction over the course of a school year were willing to share their perspectives related to the experience. Half of the group participated in individual interviews, half in a focus group. From the two groups, three interview participants and three focus group participants also were willing to be observed. The interviews and focus group conversations were each guided by 15 questions. All conversations were recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Transcripts and observation notes were coded for analysis. The coding revealed the themes of: achievement, engagement, impediments, instruction, and motivation. The themes were then related in the analysis to the two aspects of the research question, student achievement, and the social-emotional impact on students.

The results were compelling. This study was a qualitative exploration into the perceptions of the teachers as related to the impact of the instructional strategy of fun in their instruction. The data collected produced 764 individual comments or observational data points, sorted them into themes and used to identify 60 individual codes within the themes. The themes of engagement and motivation were noted as entirely positive aspects. Achievement had positive and negative aspects. Impediments and instructional needs were discussed in interviews and with the focus group in response to questions requesting the participants perceptions on the negatives related to their work. Negative data were represented by 12% of the data; and positive responses or observed behaviors were represented by 88% of the data. All positive codes were shared by multiple participants with 100% consensus on the value of fun in direct instruction. All classroom observations provided examples of the positive aspects expressed in the interviews and focus group conversation. Engagement and motivation represented 60% of the data, and the social-emotional issues were mitigated during the study.

The overarching perceptions of the group of participants can be summed up like this: fun mitigates social, emotional, and academic barriers that inhibit learning; allows students to engage and find motivation; develop resiliency; creativity; improve social connections; renew the curiosity and courage they have lost over their academic careers; and develop a pattern of success that results in measurable academic success. The students involved in the classes taught by the participants developed positive classroom cultures, broke through barriers of cliques, and learned collaboration and communication skills that allowed them to enhance learning. Fun in instruction acted as a catalyst as students forgot personal issues that had impeded learning and suspended their fear and anxiety and allowed the teachers to entice them with fun to learn in new and deeper ways. The results were beneficial to the students, the classes, and the school in that all students advanced. As one participant stated:

> There is nothing better than the look on the face of a kid who just realized they learned something they thought they could not do, because they had always been afraid to try. Group fun while you are being instructed overcomes so many barriers, I can't believe we didn't think of this before.

The consensus of participants supports the intentional inclusion of fun as a specific instructional strategy to combat academic issues and social-emotional barriers.

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Appendix A: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.*

Kimberly Cutting Tyskiewicz

Digital Signature

Kimberly Cutting Tyskiewicz

Name (Typed)

October 7, 2019

Date

Appendix B: List of Codes and Themes Utilized in the Study

Code #	*Code Name*	*Theme*
1	Assessment (Including Objectives and Goals)	Achievement
30	Learning: Easier	Achievement
31	Learning: Increased	Achievement
32	Learning: Unintentional	Achievement
7	Engagement: At-Risk/Struggling Kids Participate	Engagement
8	Engagement: Collaboration	Engagement
9	Engagement: General Increase	Engagement
11	Engagement: Kinesthetic	Engagement
12	Engagement: Paying Attention	Engagement
13	Engagement: Producing Work	Engagement
14	Engagement: Verbal	Engagement
33	Positive Response: Confidence	Engagement
34	Positive Response: Curious	Engagement
35	Positive Response: Decrease anxiety	Engagement
36	Positive Response: Desire to learn	Engagement
37	Positive Response: Energy	Engagement
38	Positive Response: Excitement	Engagement
39	Positive Response: General	Engagement
40	Positive Response: Higher rigor	Engagement
41	Positive Response: Humor from Students	Engagement
42	Positive Response: Increase Attendance	Engagement
43	Positive Response: Laughter/Smiling/ happy/having fun	Engagement
44	Positive Response: More students included	Engagement
45	Positive Response: Reciprocity of Learning	Engagement
46	Positive Response: Resiliency	Engagement
47	Positive Response: Social/Emotional Increases	Engagement
48	Positive Response: Students feel safe/included	Engagement
49	Positive Response: Students take lead in learning	Engagement
50	Positive Response: Surprised	Engagement
51	Positive Response: Trust	Engagement
52	Positive Response: Want to keep going	Engagement
53	Relationships: Class community/Climate	Engagement
54	Relationships: With peers	Engagement
55	Relationships: With teachers	Engagement
2	Danger: Can get out of hand/chaotic	Impediment
3	Danger: Ensure long-term learning	Impediment
4	Danger: Not forget objective	Impediment
5	Danger: Potentially offend someone	Impediment
16	Impediment: Disengagement/apathy	Impediment
17	Impediment: Don't see purpose	Impediment
18	Impediment: Entitlement/Want instant gratification	Impediment
19	Impediment: Lack work ethic	Impediment
20	Impediment: Negative prior experience	Impediment

Code #	*Code Name*	*Theme*
21	Impediment: Not in locus of control	Impediment
27	Instructional Need: Aligned with content	Instruction
28	Instructional Need: Appropriate level	Instruction
29	Instructional Need: Planning and time	Instruction
6	Decreased work load	Motivation
10	Engagement: Hands-on	Motivation
15	Fun: Valuable	Motivation
22	Instruction: Challenge Students	Motivation
23	Instruction: Creative	Motivation
24	Instruction: Enthusiasm	Motivation
25	Instruction: Give students choices	Motivation
26	Instruction: Humor	Motivation
56	Relevant: Beyond the subject/real-life application	Motivation
57	Willing: To be challenged	Motivation
58	Willing: To do “tedious” work	Motivation
59	Willing: To engage	Motivation
60	Willing: To take risks	Motivation

Appendix C: Observation Checklist

Class Subject:
Date of Observation:

Demographics:				
Total number of students in class				
Grades of students (all that apply):	9	10	11	12
# of students in each grade				
# of students by gender	Female		Male	
# Special Education Identified				
# Talented and Gifted				
# English Language Learners				
Overarching Climate:	Appropriate & Energetic	Appropriate and Active	Appropriate and Calm	Inappropriate
Between Students and Teacher				
Student to Student				
Classroom tone				
Teacher Behaviors:	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
Clearly set up the activity				
Sufficient explanation of expectations				
Assured all students participated				
Redirected off task students				
Facilitated smooth activity flow				
Ended with discussion on learning				
Discussed future use of information				
Student Behaviors:	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Disagree	4 - Strongly Disagree
Appropriate interactions maintained				
Appropriate participation maintained				

Appendix D: Individual Interview Questions

1. How do you determine if students are successful in your class?
2. What frustrations have you had as a teacher when it comes to getting students to learn?
3. What things do you think impact students socially or emotionally in terms of school?
4. What makes teaching more fun for you as a teacher?
5. What makes learning more fun for your students?
6. How do you determine if students are having fun in your classes?
7. What do you do specifically to make class fun during instruction?
8. What problems arise in incorporating fun in instruction?
9. What has the climate in your class been like since including fun in instruction?
10. What impact does the inclusion of fun appear to have on your students in terms of academic learning?
11. What impact does the inclusion of fun appear to have on the socio/emotional aspects for students?
12. Do you notice any differences for students who have struggled in the past when you include fun intentionally in instruction? If so, what is different?
13. What is/are the ultimate result(s) from including fun in instruction?
14. Do you see value in the intentional inclusion of fun in instruction?
15. Any other thoughts?

Appendix E: Focus Group Conversation Questions

1. How do you define “fun” in terms of school and learning?
2. In terms of school and learning, what does fun look like from a teacher perspective?
3. What makes learning more fun for your students?
4. How do you intentionally incorporate fun as a strategy for engagement or direct instruction?
5. How do you determine if students are having fun in your classes?
6. What do you do specifically to make class fun during instruction?
7. What problems arise in incorporating fun in instruction?
8. What has the climate in your class been like since including fun in instruction?
9. What impact does the inclusion of fun appear to have on your students in terms of academic learning?
10. What impact does the inclusion of fun appear to have on the socio/emotional aspects for students?
11. Do you notice any differences for students who have struggled in the past when you include fun intentionally in instruction? If so, what is different?
12. Since participating in the project, when you consider the goal of student learning, what aspects of instruction do you think are critical in order to be described as “effective instruction”?
13. What is/are the ultimate result(s) from including fun in instruction?
14. What do you believe is the value of the intentional inclusion of fun in instruction?
15. Any other thoughts?